

Putnam Pitch

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This article is an expansion based on a canon element. For canon information on this topic, follow the link to The Witcher Wiki: [School of the Crane](#).

“So, yeah, when you think of heroes, Putnam is the name that should come to mind. Despite all the crap he’s been through, he’s still standing tall and still fighting. He’s a reminder that no matter what life throws at us, we can find the courage to keep going.”

—[Fabio Sachs](#)

Kurus Akram Ziar Ur Rehman Badawi
Sova or **The Radiance of the Sun**,
Bringer of Peace better known as
Putnam Pitch, **Putnam Pitch Dinmarb**,
Putnam of Skellige, **Putnam Pitch of Skellige**, **The Knight of Flowers**, **The Golden Griffin**, **Raul Ddraig Alqatil** by [Zerrikanians](#), **Ofiriň Milli Gahrymany** by the [Ofieris](#), **Debre Simien Zeraf** by the [Zangvebarians](#), **Yirridi Wandjina** by the Mardu people, **Khamgaalach** (Хамгаалагч) by [Haaklandians](#), **An Gadaí Alqatilun** by the [Zerzurans](#), **Putnam Pyae** by the Ketukians, **Futari no tamashī** (ふたりの魂) by the Tuyotukians, **Mata Biru Hijau** by [Sabanians locals](#), **Eagle Bearer** by witches of the [School of the Owl](#), **Jierrahitáájgge** by the [Kvens](#), **Gollegriff** by the Oyruhr people, **An Greamdoir Gynvaöl** by the [Aen Ghele](#), **Maka Suilean**

Putnam Pitch



[Biographical Information](#)

Real Name	Kurus Akram Ziar Ur Rehman Badawi Sova
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by the [Silk Islands Islanders](#), **Putnam** "The Eagle" by the Crane Witchers from the third to the sixth generation, **Joaquim Sorala** (artistic alias), **Saint Putnam** by [Fabiolans](#) after his death, or simply **Putnam**, was a legendary northen hero of [Ofieri](#) origin, known [School of the Griffin](#) witcher and famous explorer. He was also the founder along with [Jolanta Dinmarb](#) of the [School of the Crane](#) after the Second Conjunction of Spheres.

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Born	11th May 1255
Birthplace	Manisa, Ofir ^[↗]
Status	Dead (sanctified)
Died	11th May 1555
Deathplace	Cherdian, Fabiola , Western Continent
Service	1275 - 1555
Physical Description	
Race	Human ^[↗] (Witcher ^[↗])
Gender	Male
Hair	Brown bleached blond (after long exposure to the sun)
Eyes	Blue and green (Manisa´s Genesis)
Skin	Fair Tanned (after prolonged exposure to the sun)
Political Information	
Profession	Witcher ^[↗] Soldier Spy [double agent] (indirectly) Explorer Pirate (indirectly) Slave (during his time in Zerzura) Bodyguard Bounty hunter (supposedly) Painter (during his time in Cherdian ^[↗]) Author (mostly indirectly)
Rank	Master Witcher Grandmaster (School of the Crane)
Titles	The Radiance of the Sun, Bringer of Peace Prince of Ofir

1.7.1. Meeting in Creyden (January 20, 1275) 1.7.2. Traveling together 1.7.3. Gradobor's Chimera (March 5, 1275)	Ofir´s National Hero Knight of the North Saint Protector against the darkness Knight of Romnor (rumored)
1.7.4. The Cave (March 6, 1275) 1.7.5. The corruption of Ebbing (May 10 - 12, 1275)	Affiliation School of the Griffin ^[↗] Skelliger Crown Telman Crown Cidarian Crown Zerrikanian Spice Company
1.7.6. The Coldwater Disaster (June, 1275) 1.7.7. Summer in Toussaint (July - October 1275)	Ofieri Crown Zangvebarian Crown Fabio Sachs Lyrian and Rivian Crown (indirectly) Kai Yih´s Pirate Confederation
1.7.7.1. Fighting Cervin for a basilisk contract 1.7.8. Separation of paths / the first breakup (October, 1275) 1.7.9. Meeting Fabio and breaking neutrality (November, 1275)	School of the Dragon (as a ally) Koviri Crown (indirectly) Duke Falmak's Amikuk Hunting Team Temerian Crown Northen Front School of the Fox (indirectly, as a substitute teacher) School of the Crane (founder) Kingdom of Romnor (rumored)
1.8. First winter as a full witcher in Kaer Seren (December 1275 - March 1276)	Alias(es)
1.9. Romance with Calina and travel to Skellige and Melukka (1276) 1.9.1. Time in Skellige (April - June 1276)	Kurus Putnam Pitch Putnam Pitch Dinmarb Putnam of Skellige Putnam Pitch of Skellige The Knight of Flowers The Golden Griffin Raul Ddraig Alqatil Ofiriň Milli Gahrymany Debre Simien Zeraf Yirridi Wandjina Khamgaalach
1.9.1.2. The tentacles in Spikeroog 1.9.1.3. Attempted coup d'état by the Vildkaarls 1.9.1.4. Breakup with Evelyn and adventures in Western Melukka	An Gadaí Alqatilun Putnam Pyae Futari no tamashī Eagle Bearer Jierahitáágge Gollegriffe An Greamdoir Gynvael Maka Suilean
1.9.1.5. Arrival at Warahše and miscellaneous contracts (August 1276) 1.9.1.6. Investigating the wrong	Putnam "The Eagle" Joaquim Sorala (artistic alias) Saint Putnam Putnam
	Nationality
	Ofieri ^[↗]

<p>clue about Tubiel and time at Telmun</p> <p>1.9.1.7. "Between Two Lands" (late August - early September 1276)</p> <p>1.9.1.8. Escape from Telmun, pass through Makkan and return to the North</p> <p>1.9.1.9. "Suprises "(early December 1276)</p> <p>1.10. Death of his adoptive father and third reencounter with Tubiel (1277)</p> <p>1.10.1. The Incurable Curse (March, 1277)</p> <p>1.10.2. The Knight of Flowers (May, 1277)</p> <p>1.10.3. Traveling with Trill (May - June 1277)</p> <p>1.10.4. Reencounter and first life at Brenna with Tubiel (Summer 1277, from June to September approx)</p> <p>1.10.5. Stay at Dyn Marv with the first lynxes and romance with Dragonfly (September - December 1277)</p> <p>1.11. Working for the Zerrikanian Spice Company (1278)</p> <p>1.11.1. Defending national trade routes and travelling south (January - March 1278)</p> <p>1.11.1.1. "The Price of Innocence" (March 1278)</p> <p>1.11.1.2. "Killing gods" (April 1278)</p> <p>1.11.2. Putnam's imprisonment and trial (Late April 1278)</p>	<p>Coat of Arms</p>  <p>Relationships</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>Father</td><td>Nibras^[↗] Johan Pitch (adoptive father) Keldar^[↗] (father figure)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Mother</td><td>Nelea Sova Matlena (mother figure)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Sibling(s)</td><td>Mimit (biological twin brother) Sirvat^[↗] (step brother) Nurshah (step sister) Coën^[↗] (older brother figure) Vargos (middle brother figure) Dasnarr (older sister figure) Anika Marsir (little sister figure)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Lover(s)</td><td>Tubiel of Brenna (girlfriend / wife) [1275 - 1280] Calina (one time lover) [1276] Evelyn Ruach (lover) [1276] Roxana (lover) [1276] Herna of Gemmeria (lover) [1276] Triss Merigold^[↗] (one time lover) [1277] Trill (lover / girlfriend) [1277] Dragonfly^[↗] (girlfriend) [1277] Adela (lover) [1278] Towşan (one time lover) [1279] Radeyah^[↗] (girlfriend / lover) [1278 / 1279 / 1300] Makeda (girlfriend) [1279] Melda (lover) [1279] A very extensive list of one-night lovers (July - September 1280) Jolanta (lover / girlfriend / fifth wife) [1280 - 1281 / 1286 / 1360 / 1381 - 1510] D'yaebi (lover) [1280 - 1284] Marina aep Dornala (girlfriend)</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Father	Nibras ^[↗] Johan Pitch (adoptive father) Keldar ^[↗] (father figure)	Mother	Nelea Sova Matlena (mother figure)	Sibling(s)	Mimit (biological twin brother) Sirvat ^[↗] (step brother) Nurshah (step sister) Coën ^[↗] (older brother figure) Vargos (middle brother figure) Dasnarr (older sister figure) Anika Marsir (little sister figure)	Lover(s)	Tubiel of Brenna (girlfriend / wife) [1275 - 1280] Calina (one time lover) [1276] Evelyn Ruach (lover) [1276] Roxana (lover) [1276] Herna of Gemmeria (lover) [1276] Triss Merigold ^[↗] (one time lover) [1277] Trill (lover / girlfriend) [1277] Dragonfly ^[↗] (girlfriend) [1277] Adela (lover) [1278] Towşan (one time lover) [1279] Radeyah ^[↗] (girlfriend / lover) [1278 / 1279 / 1300] Makeda (girlfriend) [1279] Melda (lover) [1279] A very extensive list of one-night lovers (July - September 1280) Jolanta (lover / girlfriend / fifth wife) [1280 - 1281 / 1286 / 1360 / 1381 - 1510] D'yaebi (lover) [1280 - 1284] Marina aep Dornala (girlfriend)
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		[1281] Hira Aen Hurashim (lover) [1282] Tuya (lover) [1282] Nabla (lover) [1283] Ciri ^[2] (one time lover) [1283] Kai Yih (girlfriend) [1283] Ito Yusuri (lover) [1285] Alanna Pitch (second wife) [1285 - 1286] Ásgærðr (lover) [1287] Mazheva (lover) [1287] Veejovva (lover) [1288] Keira Metz ^[2] (girlfriend) [1288 - 1290] Aine Pitch (third wife / one time lover) [1290 - 1300 / 1358] Creti (1302 - 1306) A very extensive list of lovers (1306 - 1325) Enya (fourth wife) [1325 - 1353]
	Other	Salim I The Great (grandfather) Braith (sexual abuser) [1271] Sigurd Pitch of Brenna (adoptive son) Stefan "The Crane" (adoptive son) Orser "The Robin" (adoptive son) Ucalt "The Vulture" (adoptive son) Ezeld "The Parrot" (adoptive son) Acol "The I 'iwi" (adoptive son) Deeran "The Hoa" (adoptive son) Enu "The Flamingo" (adoptive son) Uzoma "The Alicanto" (adoptive son) Idowu "The Benu" (adoptive son) Math "The Boobrie" (adoptive son) Halsey "The Basan" (adoptive daughter) Putnam Sachs (godson) Tubiel Sachs (goddaugther) Heda Sachs (goddaugther) Canata Sachs (goddaugther) Sylthana (niece) [rumored]

1279)

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Biography

Early life

The witcher who was born on May 11, 1255, in the city of Manisa can be classified as a walking peace agreement. He was born in the territories of East Ofir, better known as Opir, which had been annexed by malliq Nibras in the same year. This unification was the result of a campaign initiated by his father, the malliq Salim I The Great, to bring all of Ofir under his control. With the threat of a possible war with Nilfgaard becoming present, Salim decided to unify the territory under a single ruler, knowing that fragmentation would only make them more easily conquered. Fortunately, this threat came to nothing after Nilfgaard decided to conquer their neighboring kingdoms and expand northward.

Although Nibras was given credit for unifying all of [Ofir](#), the reality is that his father had already conquered most of the areas that had once belonged to the powerful [Oshan Empire](#), the most powerful empire on The Continent, before the rising of the Black Ones. The Oshan Empire occupied most of the fragmented [Far South](#) territory, except for East Ofir, which had managed to remain independent for a long time. East Ofir had been a regional power for centuries, known for its economic prosperity and cultural diversity.

During this period of independence, East Ofir was ruled by the Sova, a powerful clan of sorcerers who followed the ancient traditions of the extinct Kingdom of Zóar. They were recognized for their natural talent in magic, which was attributed to their Source bloodline. The Sova were characterized by the color of their eyes, with one blue eye and one green eye, a trait that was passed down through their magical genesis known as [Manisa's Genesis](#).

The Sova played a significant role in the history of East Ofir, preserving its independence through the wise use of magic, diplomacy, and commerce. However, their rule came to an end with the annexation of East Ofir by Nibras,

which marked the beginning of a new era for the region. In the end, due to a series of strategic errors in addition to many others, East Ofir fell. Slowly, yes, but fell. At such a point, only the city of Manisa remained as the remains of what was once a great power in the lands of the Far South.

And although they had great magical talent, far superior to those present at the Imperial Magic Academy and Sodden's sorcerers/sorceresses combined, their abilities were no match for the strategic prowess of Aamad, a young sorcerer who was the best friend of the newly appointed Malliq Nibras. Aamad played a key role in the conquest of the last independent territory with other important figures such other mages like Radeyah and Kalesti.

During the siege, the Sova Clan sorcerers put up a fierce resistance against the invading forces, but ultimately, their magical prowess was not enough to withstand the overwhelming numbers and strategic abilities of Nibras and his allies. Many lives were lost in the prolonged conflict, mostly sorcerers who had fought bravely to defend their homeland.

Despite the heavy casualties, Aamad, Radeyah, Kalesti, and their companions persevered, relentlessly pressing on until the last bastion of East Ofir fell on September 9, 1254. With the fall of the city, East Ofir's long history of independence came to an end, and all of Ofir was finally united under the leadership of a single ruler.

The Sova and the inhabitants of the region had a hard time accepting their defeat, particularly due to their fear of losing their customs. Salim's actions with certain "unconquerable" tribes had spread, and they feared that his son would do the same. This fear was particularly strong among the newly appointed young queen Nelea Sova, who had begun her mandate in the war after her mother's death on the battlefield and had ended it with this defeat.

However, Nibras proved to be pious in that sense and did not repeat the mistakes that had tarnished his father's reputation. He relaxed the terms of the surrender significantly, so much so that Nelea could even continue to be considered queen and continue to govern her territory, although in a somewhat similar manner to the duchy of Toussaint in the Nilfgaardian Empire.

Nibras understood that the key to a long-lasting peace was not only military conquest but also the hearts and minds of the conquered people. He knew that if the Sova and their fellow inhabitants of the region felt that their customs and way of life were respected, they would be more likely to accept their new ruler

and his vision for the future.

Thus, Nibras went out of his way to show respect for the local customs and traditions. He made sure that the Sova were allowed to continue their cultural practices, and he even appointed local officials to help govern the newly acquired territory. His goal was to create a sense of unity and common purpose between the people of Ofir, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background.

At the same time, Nibras was also pragmatic. He knew that future uprisings could threaten the stability of his new kingdom, so he insisted on the condition of an heir who would unify the two territories. This demand was not meant to be oppressive but rather a way to ensure that the people of Ofir had a stake in their future and that their interests would be protected.

Ultimately, Nibras' vision for Ofir was one of unity and prosperity, and his policies reflected this. By respecting the customs and traditions of the local population while also providing for their security and future stability, Nibras paved the way for a new era of peace and prosperity in Ofir.

Such was the era of prosperity and peace that, by the time the Third Northern War occurred from 1271 to 1273, an aging Nibras could afford to sold part of his elite troops, the famous Immortals, and war animals such as elephants to support the North in its fight against Nilfgaard.

Nelea, having no other choice, accepted the terms proposed by Nibras. A wedding, following local customs, was quickly arranged, and on September 11, 1254, they consummated their union, giving rise to two twin brothers, Kurus (Putnam) and Mimit, nine months later.

At first, Nelea and Nibras seemed to be happy together, despite the circumstances of their marriage. However, their happiness was short-lived. Aamad's curiosity and ambition prevailed over the couple, and he became obsessed with the genetics of the Sova clan. Many sorcerers in the region had sought to uncover the secrets of this clan for centuries, and Aamad was not going to miss this opportunity to finally reveal them to the rest of the country. Furthermore, the fact that Kurus was born with the "gift" made Aamad even more interested in the family. The other twin, Mimit, did not hold any interest for him as he wasn't born with the "gift". This was how many ofieri mages referred to those who were born with a natural affinity for channeling Chaos. With East Ofir taken and Aamad's growing influence in the palace, he had everything he needed to unravel the mysteries of

the Sova clan.

However, Nelea, being a good mother, intervened and prevented Aamad from taking their children. Unfortunately, she underestimated the power that Aamad held within the court. As a result, she was falsely accused of treason to the kingdom and was forced to flee with her two children to avoid the terrible fate that Aamad had prepared for them.

Nelea knew that Aamad would stop at nothing, and that he might even try to use Mimit as an emergency resource despite his lack of "the gift". Therefore, she decided to take both of her children with her to ensure their safety.

Nelea, who was being persecuted for supposed treason, fled to territories further north in search of a safe haven. However, she knew that Aamad's influence was far-reaching, and she could never truly escape him and his plans for their children. Therefore, she made two difficult decisions in order to protect them.

First, she took Mimit to Nilfgaard and entrusted him to the sorcerers of the Imperial Magic Academy, granting them permission to use him as leverage if Aamad and his associates attempt to find her. Nelea knew that he had not been born with the gift, which made him less valuable to the mage. East Ofir had been able to make several contacts with Nilfgaard and the Northern Kingdoms prior to the greater contact made in the 1270s by Nibras with the establishment of embassies, due to possessing a coast. Even some Sova had been sent to study at the academy of Loc Grim to reinforce their knowledge and to find out if the Nilfgaardians had some magical knowledge that they did not, being Nelea one of them, she made a lot of friends there, so she knew or at least believed that her son would be in good hands.

Secondly, she abandoned Kurus in a village in Brugge when he was just three months old, knowing that it was the only way to save him from Aamad's inhuman experiments. The remote location and lack of knowledge of the ofieri people by the nordlings by that time, with only a few merchant ships reached coastal kingdoms like Cidaris, and by the ofieri about the region, made it the perfect hiding spot for Kurus.

Nelea's disappearance after these decisions was shrouded in mystery. Rumors suggested that she had fled to Zerrikania or Haakland, but no one could confirm her whereabouts. It was as if she had vanished from the face of the earth. Despite the efforts of her own clan, no one was able to trace her location or find any clues to her whereabouts.

After the tragic loss of his children and wife, Nibras continued to rule justly and prosperously, and was even called "The Shining One" in some provinces of Ofir. Despite feeling somewhat depressed and hurt, he rejected marriage proposals, including those from satraps who offered their daughters, and instead opted to have a harem like his father before him. He felt he could not commit himself again after losing Nelea, whom he had truly loved, and replacing her with another wife did not seem fair to him.

Over time, Nibras's affections shifted and he grew particularly fond of Zaira, who reminded him of his missing wife. Before Zaira, he had been infatuated with Dayo and fathered his third son, Prince Sirvat, with her. He was so taken with Dayo that he had her undergo the process of "eternal youth" used by sorceresses. However, he eventually grew tired of her and gifted her to the Haaklandian prince, Zeus Burkhan Khaldun, during his visit to Ofir in 1274.

Although by 1273, after the events that occurred with Geralt of Rivia, Radeyah, and Zaira, Nibras would end up taking a new woman from his harem named Shireen with whom he would have his first daughter, princess Nurshah.

Kurus was eventually saved when he was found by a villager named Johan Pitch on the same day he was abandoned. Johan heard the baby's cries coming from a small cave near the village, and he decided to name the lost child, Putnam, which means "*dweller of the hollow*".

Johan Pitch was out hunting when he heard Kurus's cries coming from the cave. Initially, he thought it might be a wild animal, but the sounds were too human-like. Following the noise, he discovered the abandoned baby and quickly took him back to the village. The news of the abandoned infant spread like wildfire through the small community, and the villagers gathered around Johan's hut, eager to see the child.

At first, everyone was unsure what to do with the infant. Some believed he was cursed or possessed, while others were more sympathetic, wanting to do whatever they could to help. Johan, however, was determined to do whatever it took to save the baby's life.

He enlisted the help of the most experienced mothers in the village, who took turns caring for the infant and nursing him back to health.

Despite the challenges they faced, Kurus survived and thrived. Everything was good for a

few days, and Johan, who had always wanted a child but had been unable to have one due to his wife's death, was overjoyed. However, clashes with tax collectors soon arose, and Johan realized that the boy's fate was uncertain. In his ignorance, he came up with an idea inspired by his deceased wife, to make the boy a free man, not having to suffer those abuses, turning him into a witcher. She a painter who had been exiled from the Nilfgaardian Empire after her true identity as a woman was discovered, greatly admired witchers and their work, considering them to be true free men, rather than vassals of any empire or kingdom. In fact, it was the witcher Kristov of White Orchard, from the School of the Griffin who had helped her reach the North.

Taking his wife's words to heart, Johan sold all his possessions, including the paintings his wife had made during her exile, and embarked on a journey north to find the witchers. He was determined to give Putnam the best chance at life possible. They went through bad patches, but people's good hearts. He made it possible for him, and the one he already considered his son, to continue their journey for the next 3 months.

As they journeyed, the kindness of strangers was a guiding light for them. People they met along the way were moved by the bond between Johan and Putnam, and many offered them food, shelter, and other essential needs. Their journey was not an easy one, but the support they received from others made it more bearable.

Putnam, despite being a mere baby, played an essential role in their journey. His beautiful, unique two-colored eyes often caught the attention of others, and his charming and funny demeanor helped to soften even the hardest of hearts. Mothers, in particular, were touched by his innocence and vulnerability, and many went out of their way to offer help to Johan and Putnam.

Legends say that Johan and Putnam even had the honor of meeting the legendary Visenna, who, like many others, helped them on their journey. However, she was not entirely convinced of Johan's plans and tried to persuade him to take the boy to Ban Ard, leave him with her, or bring him to the druids of Kovir, as she sensed his magical potential. Despite her efforts, Johan was resolute in his decision. He held a grudge against mages and did not trust the druids due to their excessive protection of nature. Nonetheless, Johan thanked Visenna for her assistance, and she provided him with directions to his destination.

For three arduous months, Johan and Putnam persevered in their journey north, never losing sight of their ultimate goal: to find the witches and offer Putnam a chance at a better life. However, fate had other plans in store for them. One day, as they neared Lan Exeter, they were ambushed by two hungry amaroks. Johan feared for their lives, but at the last moment, they were saved by two witches from the School of the Griffin: Coën of Poviss and Jerome Moreau.

Johan explained the situation to the witches and expressed his desire to stay with them until Putnam was older. Surprisingly, the witches accepted the proposal, on the condition that Johan and Putnam help them rebuild Kaer Seren, which had been destroyed by an avalanche caused by sorcerers seeking the knowledge in the library, and Johan worked on various projects for the witches while Putnam was his training. Jerome was particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of having students again, and he welcomed the idea of Putnam becoming a witcher.

Jerome's experiences with his father and the tortures he had been subjected to had shown him that witches were still necessary, as monsters took many forms. This belief drove him to search for other Griffins, and after years of effort, he managed to locate around forty of the three hundred and fifty witches that they were before the avalanche, basically the survivors who were at The Path when the incident occurred. He then proved to a depressed Keldar that there was still a purpose for them, and Putnam became the sign they needed to revitalize their school.

Fortunately for Jerome and the surviving Griffins, it did appear that Putnam was that beacon of hope, since once the 1260s arrived, and as the miners in Kovir began to mine deeper, monsters began to emerge from the mines, killing them, and not even mercenaries could take care of them. So, listening to their workers about the good work of The Griffins, the bourgeois owners of these mines, contacted them, and offered them the reconstruction of their fortress, in exchange for putting an end to the problems in the mines.

And once this meeting happened, the two witches, the villager, and the baby left for the Koviri Mountains, where Putnam would find a home and family during his next years.

Training and raising in Kaer Seren (1255 - 1275)

The fifteenth generation of witches at the School of the Griffin was the group of

students who began their training in the years 1255-1275. This generation was the first to begin their training after the avalanche and during the time of the fortress reconstruction.

Despite the challenges they faced, the students of the fifteenth generation at the School of the Griffin were determined to uphold the school's values and ideals. As the first generation to begin their training after the avalanche, the fifteenth generation of witchers at the School of the Griffin played an important role in re-establishing the school's reputation as a prominent institution for witcher training and its adherence to the original ideals of the [Order of Witchers](#).

His training over the next 20 years at Kaer Seren occurred normally, just like any other witcher. With the exception of a few incidents because of his condition as a [Source](#) which were solved due to Braith's intervention and the state of the fortress till the 1260s.

As the reconstruction of the fortress progressed, Putnam and the other students were also involved in the rebuilding efforts. They helped to clear debris, repair damaged structures, and even assisted in the construction of new buildings. This experience helped them to develop a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork, as well as a deep appreciation for the importance of community and the role of the witchers in protecting it.

This generation consisted of : Alessio of Toussaint, Angelo of Poviss, Domenico, Federico of Lan Exeter, Giorgio of Kovir, Mygdin Vosil, Putnam Pitch, [Tubiel of Brenna](#), [Kemro of Cintra](#) and [Zivor of Redania](#).

During all that time, Putnam stood out above his peers with the use of the sword. Art that [Coën](#) personally taught him. Until Coën was sent by [Keldar](#) to know the situation of the other schools.

Main bonds in Kaer Seren

“Remember, boy, neutrality is a witcher's greatest weapon. One misstep, one moment of weakness, and you'll end up like Coën, lying in a battlefield”

—Keldar to Putnam after receiving the news of Coën's death at the Battle of Brenna

Putnam had a special bond with Coën, who acted as an older brother figure to him. Coën was a skilled witcher and a respected member of the Griffin School, and he took Putnam under his wing, teaching him the ways of the sword and the witcher's code. Putnam looked up to Coën as a role model, and the two

developed a close bond as they trained together. As Putnam's training progressed, Coën became increasingly impressed with the young witcher's skill and dedication. He saw a lot of himself in Putnam and was determined to help him reach his full potential. Coën spent countless hours training Putnam in swordplay often pushing him harder than any of the other students. But despite the rigorous training, Putnam never once complained and always strove to be better. As Putnam grew older, Coën also taught him about the political and social aspects of being a witcher, preparing him for the challenges he would face in the outside world.

Coën's trip to visit the other witcher schools was a difficult time for Putnam. As Coën was not only his older brother figure, but also one of the few people Putnam truly trusted and confided in since his best friend and future lover, Tubiel left the school. With Coën gone, Putnam felt a sense of loss and isolation, as he struggled to continue his training without his trusted mentor and friend by his side.

He was always there to guide and support Putnam, both in his training and in his personal life. As Putnam struggled with the physical and emotional challenges of being a witcher, Coën was always there to offer words of encouragement and advice. He taught Putnam the importance of discipline, focus, and perseverance, and helped him to develop the skills and mindset needed to become a successful witcher. He was fiercely protective of him, and would not hesitate to defend him against anyone who dared to harm him.

When news of Coën's death reached Kaer Seren, Putnam was devastated. The loss of Coën was a heavy blow to Putnam, who struggled to come to terms with the fact that his brother was no longer with him. Despite the overwhelming sadness he felt, Putnam did his best to honor Coën's memory. He threw himself into his training, determined to become a witcher worthy of the title Coën had held. He trained harder than ever before, pushing himself to be the best witcher he could be. He also started to have nightmares and a more aggressive behavior, specially when he felt threatened. As time passed, Putnam learned to cope with Coën's death and moved on, but the loss of his mentor and friend stayed with him, shaping him into the witcher he became.

Being the "golden boy" of the school, whom many of the Griffins held in high esteem as the first student to come after the disaster, Putnam spent a lot of time with several of them in particular, not only being their apprentice, but being something like their godson. A notorious example of this, apart from whom he

regarded as his older brother, was [Ryvlyn of Sanzode](#), from whom he enjoyed listening to his stories and advices every winter.

Putnam's relationship with Ryvlyn was that of an uncle-nephew. Ryvlyn, with his wealth of knowledge and experience, was a guide for Putnam, who looked up to him with admiration and respect. Ryvlyn's calm and collected demeanor, as well as his fascination with magic and knowledge, made him a valuable source of wisdom for Putnam. They spent many winters together, with Ryvlyn sharing stories and advice from his travels and experiences. Ryvlyn, for his part, like many others saw potential in Putnam and took a keen interest in his development as a witcher, often giving him guidance and support when he was at Kaer Seren. He also taught him how to live with the prejudices of the world, and how to behave in different situations.

Vargos was one of Putnam's other mentors at the Griffin School. Being one of the youngest witches at the school, he had a unique perspective on the challenges that Putnam faced during his training. Vargos was known for his focus on the physical training, and he pushed Putnam to improve his strength, endurance, and agility. He also taught Putnam various techniques for tracking monsters, drawing on his own experiences in the field.

Their relationship was one of mutual respect and admiration. Putnam respected Vargos for his skill and knowledge, and Vargos recognized Putnam's potential and dedication to the witcher's craft. Despite the age gap, they became close, almost like brothers, although their relationship was not like older brother - younger brother, but rather, middle brother to younger brother. Vargos was one of the people that Putnam could trust, and the fact that he was one of the youngest witches, made it easier for Putnam to open up to him about some of the experiences he had, such as Braith's abuse.

Putnam's relationship with Elcon was another of mutual respect and admiration. Elcon was an experienced witcher, who had a deep understanding of potion-making and alchemy, and he was able to pass on his knowledge and skills to Putnam and the other students in his group. Elcon was also known for having a kind and patient personality, which helped him to connect with the students and create a positive learning environment. He had a certain fondness for Putnam's little group, and he would often take the time to provide them with extra help when it was necessary.

Despite the fact that they were all still students, Elcon saw the potential in each of them and did his best to help them develop their skills. He also had a keen sense of humor and would often inject a touch of levity in the classes, making them fun and enjoyable for the students.

Putnam's relationship with Matlena was one of deep respect and affection. She was like a mother figure to him, taking in some ways the role that Coën had, after his death in the Battle of Brenna. She took on the task of complete Putnam's training in the ways of the sword. She also taught him bomb-making and etiquette, and even sex education when the time came, which helped him to become a well-rounded witcher. Although the sex education classes did not have much effect, due to the trauma of Braith's abuse, most of the time Putnam ended up suffering from depersonalization when he had the classes.

Matlena had a deep understanding of Putnam's emotional state and tried to be there for him as much as she could. She knew that he was still struggling with the loss of Coën and years later the trauma of Braith's abuse, but she did her best to help him through it. She was also in charge of giving Putnam the steel sword that Coën ordered for him for his 16th birthday to the dwarves.

Matlena had a difficult decision to make when she learned of Braith's crime. On one hand, she wanted to protect Putnam and ensure that Braith was held accountable for her actions. On the other hand, she knew that exposing Braith would cause a great deal of turmoil within the school and potentially harm Putnam even more. Matlena ultimately decided to keep the matter quiet and handle it within the school. She did not want to risk damaging the reputation of the Griffin School or putting Putnam through the trauma of a public trial. She also believed that Braith could be rehabilitated. Although her decision may have been controversial, Matlena's primary concern was always the well-being of Putnam and the preservation of the Griffin School. She believed that this was the best course of action to protect him and the school in the long run.

It must be taken into account, the situation they were in, with barely forty Griffins remaining active and their rejection of the mages, due to the avalanche, had forced them to have a fragile pact with the druids of Kovir that was necessary to maintain, if they did not want to end up extinct. Because, although the mutation laboratory had survived as it was underground in a basement, those Griffins with knowledge of the mutations had not, much less the mages, for many had betrayed them and caused the accident that nearly wiped them

out, causing Keldar to kill them. So, they had to turn to the druids, who unlike other from different Circles, like the ones of the Circle of Mayena, did believe that the monsters were and still were a problem that affected the ecology of the world. Thus allying themselves with the reconstructed Griffins to solve it. But it was a tense relationship, with each trying to exert power over the other, so Matlena took this into account when making her decision.

Birrexii of Poviss served as a magic mentor to Putnam during his training. Birrexii's teachings focused on helping Putnam master the use of Signs, a key aspect of a witcher's combat arsenal and more in a Griffin Witcher. She taught him the different types of Signs and their various uses, as well as how to effectively use them in combat. She also helped him to develop his own unique style and strategies for using Signs.

Despite Putnam's condition as a Source, Birrexii was able to adapt her teachings to his specific needs and helped him to control and harness his powers, with a nurturing and patient attitude towards Putnam during his training. She recognized that he was a special case, so she was understanding and compassionate towards his struggles and was always willing to help him work through them. She was a strict teacher, but also had a good sense of humor and a warm personality, which made Putnam feel comfortable and at ease around her.

During Putnam's training , there was an incident where Putnam unintentionally used his Source abilities during a exercise. It is said that the incident occurred around 1270, when Putnam was around 15 years old. Putnam was practicing the use of Signs with his fellow students, when suddenly, he lost control of his powers and unleashed a powerful blast of energy that caused significant damage to the training grounds. His fellow students were shocked and frightened, and many of them were injured as a result of the incident.

Birrexii, who was present during the incident, quickly realized that Putnam 's nature and knew that he must have had a hard time controlling his powers. She immediately took action and helped to stabilize the situation. She explained to the other students that Putnam's abilities were not dangerous and that he was not in control of them. She also tended to the injured students and helped Putnam to calm down.

Birrexii's reaction was one of understanding and compassion. She knew that it was not easy for Putnam and that he needed help. The incident showed that

Putnam still had a long way to go in terms of mastering his abilities, but Birrexii was determined to help him get there.

Their relationship could be described as having an aunt-nephew dynamic. Despite the challenges he faced due to his abilities as a Source, Birrexii never lost faith in him. Like others she had a strong sense of protectiveness and care for him. She saw him not just as a student but as a member of her family.

In another incident shortly thereafter, Putnam's powers flared up again, this time causing a more severe incident, which led to several students being injured. This incident caused great concern among the Griffins, and many of them suggested that Putnam wear a dimeritium earring to regulate his powers. One, small enough not to nullify magic, but big enough not to cause any more disasters.

Birrexii was the only one who opposed this idea, arguing that it would not only be cruel to Putnam, but also that it would not solve the underlying problem of him being a Source. She believed that with proper guidance and training, Putnam could learn to control his powers and use them for good, rather than being constantly suppressed, and that his Signs could be limited by it, knowing his magical natural talent. Despite Birrexii's objections, the Griffins ultimately decided that the dimerite earring was necessary to prevent any further incidents from occurring. Putnam was taken to Braith, to have the earring made. It was during this visit that Putnam experienced his first major trauma, as Braith sexually abused him while he was under her care.

Putnam's bond with Dasnarr was a unique one, as
she taught him the harsh realities of the witcher's life
with a rough, yet affectionate manner. Dasnarr was known for her no-nonsense attitude and her tendency to be tough on everyone, but she also had a soft side that she reserved for those she cared about. Putnam quickly learned to respect and admire Dasnarr, and he saw her older sister. Finding another replacement figure after Coen's death.

Putnam also had a good relationship with [Jalast](#), the librarian at the fortress. Jalast was not only responsible for maintaining the library's vast collection of books and manuscripts, but he also served as a history teacher to Putnam, providing him with knowledge and understanding of the world's history and cultures. Putnam spent a lot of time in the library under Jalast's guidance, learning about the history of the Order of Witchers, the witcher schools, the Conjunction of the Spheres, and the various cultures and societies of The

Continent. This awakened in him a curiosity, which many years later, would be reflected in his friendship with Fabio Sachs and his exploration expeditions with him.

Jalast's teachings not only expanded Putnam's knowledge but also sparked a love of books and learning within him. He would often seek Jalast's advice and guidance on various topics, and the librarian was always happy to oblige. Jalast's teachings helped Putnam to understand the context in which witches existed and the role they played in the world, which helped to shape his worldview and his sense of purpose as a witcher.

Due to the avalanche, many books had been lost and of others, only fragments remained. Occasionally, when new book material was brought in by employees who were paid by the bourgeois owners of the Koviri mines for the reconstruction, Jalast and Putnam along with Tubiel of Brenna before her departing to the School of the Cat, would spend hours poring over the texts, trying to piece together the missing information and fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

Jalast also helped Putnam to develop his critical thinking skills, encouraging him to question the texts he read and to think for himself. This helped Putnam to become a more analytical and reflective person, which served him well in his later years as a witcher. Even after Putnam graduated from Kaer Seren, he would still seek Jalast's counsel and advice, and the two remained close throughout their lives. Including when Jalast joined the School of the Fox it was not at all uncommon for several letters to reach [Burov Mylne](#) during one month from his former student, asking for advice or asking different questions that had popped in his mind.

As a curiosity, during the first three years of Putnam's life, it was Coën, Jalast, Matlena, Keldar, and Johan who took care of him. Jalast felt quite empathetic towards Putnam, as they both had a similar past of being sent away at babies to the [School of the Griffin](#).

Olivier and Putnam had a unique relationship during Putnam's training at the School of the Griffin. As one of Putnam's teachers, Olivier was tasked with training him in the art of combat in different terrains. With his experience and knowledge, Olivier was able to teach Putnam how to navigate and fight in a variety of environments,

from the snowy mountains to the dense forests.

Despite his serious demeanor, Olivier had a sharp wit and a sarcastic sense of humor. He was not afraid to make a joke or a pun at Putnam's expense, but it was all in good fun and served to lighten the mood during the intense training sessions. Putnam, being a quick learner, quickly picked up on Olivier's style and was able to match his wit and sarcasm. Olivier always brought up the story of the garkains he killed at Lan Exeter as an example of how to adapt to different terrains and situations.

Despite having all worked on the reconstruction and, in a way, developing a feeling of communion and teamwork. The classist feelings of superiority, of a part of this generation, were still present. This led them to bully those of different status, being the students who were the bastard children of the Kovirian bourgeois and noblemen, who had been "gifted" to the Griffins, who bullied the others, those who had been rescued from living on the streets or came very early to the fortress, as was the case with Putnam.

So Putnam formed a close friendship with Kemro, Zivor, and Tubiel. They bonded over their shared experiences of being bullied and discriminated against by their classmates, who looked down on them for their humble origins and unique physical characteristics. Despite the cruelty of these classmates, the four friends stood together, never losing their compassion for one another. Sadly, Tubiel had to leave the school at a young age due to mutations related issues, but she almost completed her training at the Cat School.

Their friendship was solidified when the classmates began to pick on Kemro for its intersex condition during a communal bath time. At the time, Kemro felt alone and vulnerable, but that all changed when it met Putnam, Zivor, and Tubiel. They stood up for Kemro, shielding it from the bullying and showing it kindness and support. This act of bravery and compassion cemented their bond, and they soon found comfort in each other's company.

As they trained and grew stronger, both physically and emotionally, Putnam and his friends proved that they were just as skilled and capable as their classmates, if not more so. Despite the ongoing discrimination they faced, their bond remained unbreakable, and they, along with only Putnam, Zivor and Kemro, graduated as some of the most skilled witches of their generation. The other students who used to bully them

did not survive the training and Trials.

Even after graduation, their friendship continued to thrive, and they often found themselves working together on missions. Throughout their lives, they supported each other through thick and thin, always looking out for each other's well-being. Despite the challenges they faced as witchers in a dangerous and prejudiced world, their bond remained strong, making them a tight-knit group that could face anything together.

Putnam and Adela's relationship was complicated, marked by tension and an unequal power dynamic. It could be described as one of distant foster cousins. Adela, being a renowned witcheress, was not a regular presence at Kaer Seren during Putnam's time as a student there. However, during winter visits to the fortress, Putnam had the opportunity to interact with her, who was tasked with teaching him how to ride a horse.

Despite her responsibilities as a tutor, their relationship remained distant and formal. Adela was reserved and aloof, and Putnam felt intimidated by her witcher abilities and youth. Despite having a crush on her, he struggled to connect with her on a personal level. Their interactions were often awkward and strained.

Beside these challenges, Putnam was grateful for the opportunity to learn from Adela, who was highly skilled in horsemanship. Under her guidance, he became a skilled horseback rider. It wasn't until 1278, when they worked together, that their relationship improved and evolved.

Putnam's relationship with Old Keldar was a complex one. On one hand, Keldar was a respected and powerful figure within the Griffin School, and Putnam knew that he had much to learn from him in terms of monster knowledge and combat tactics. On the other hand, Keldar was known for his strict and demanding teaching style, and Putnam often struggled to meet his expectations. Despite this, Putnam held a deep respect for Keldar and the knowledge he possessed, and he was determined to prove himself worthy of the witcher's teachings. Keldar, on the other hand, saw potential in Putnam and often gave him challenging tasks to test his abilities and knowledge. He also recognized Putnam's devotion and dedication to the witcher's code and the Griffin School's ideals.

In addition to all this, it should be added that due to the time Johan spent away doing work for The Griffins. Keldar eventually became a father figure to Putnam.

So much so, that later, the witcher would say that he grew up with two dads. One who taught him kindness and the good things in life, Johan. And another who taught him the dark parts and bad things in life, and how to prepare for them, Keldar.

It should be noted that Keldar was not aware of the abuse that Putnam suffered from Braith, and if he had known, it's likely that he would have taken action to protect Putnam and bring justice to the situation. Because deep down, Keldar felt grateful to the boy, for restoring his hope. Added to the fact of seeing him grow up, he had come to consider him as if he were his own son. His youngest son, behind Vargos and Coën, but his son after all.

The abuse

At the age of 16, Putnam's life was forever changed when he was a victim of sexual abuse by Braith, a druid who helped with the mutation process of the new generation of witches at the School of the Griffin. Braith, who was trusted and respected by the Griffins, took advantage of her position and power to manipulate and abuse Putnam.

The trauma of the abuse deeply affected Putnam, leaving him with emotional scars that would stay with him throughout his life. It affected his ability to trust and form intimate relationships during a long time, being some exceptions [Tubiel of Brenna](#), [Fabio Sachs](#) and [Adalwulf of Aedirn](#), as well as leaving him with feelings of shame and self-blame who only incremented after another series of tragic events.

The abuse was not widely known among the other witches, and Braith was able to continue her position at the School of the Griffin without facing consequences for her actions. Putnam, however, was forced to confront the trauma and work through it on his own, a process that shaped and influenced his personality quite a lot.

Mutations

The age at which Putnam underwent mutations was 10. He was mutated under the supervision of Gah'el of Kagen. Putnam, unlike other children who were trained at Kaer Seren with him, was not subjected to extra experiments, like Zivor, for example who, due to the extra mutations, ended up growing taller, more muscular and stronger than the average witcher. But in exchange, he lost

his hair, his sensitivity to magic (preventing him from using Signs, although this also made him unaffected by magic) and acquired some cognitive problems that made him basically "*a child in the body of a giant witcher*".

All this, because of what at first the most veteran witches thought was a error. When he got his cat's eyes, but not the characteristic amber color, but his same previous color, but more vivid. This led to some of the other survivors children (with the exception of [Kemro of Cintra](#) and Zivor of Redania) to laugh at him, which in turn led to a violent fight in which Putnam was the protagonist.

This incident led to Putnam being isolated from the other children, as the witches at Kaer Seren were not sure how to handle his possible new mutation or mistake, eventually, they decided to monitor Putnam closely to see if there were any other differences or unique abilities that he possessed as a result of this unusual change. Finally discovering that he had no special mutation, simply that his genetics had made changing his eyes to amber cat eyes impossible. Intensifying the color of his original eyes and giving him the feline pupil. Despite the initial ridicule he faced from some of the other mutated children, Putnam's unique trait was eventually seen as valuable among the witches, as it made him easily recognizable in a crowd.

Additionally, due to his genetics, Putnam lost his hair for a period of time following the mutation process. This traumatized him and led to his habit of keeping his hair long.

Death of Coën

"You have big shoes to fill, Putnam. Remember that the medallion you wear is not only a symbol of your training, but of Coën's legacy. Honor it, and make him proud"

—[Matlena](#) to Putnam once the medallion was given to him

Coën's death was something that had a great impact on the School of the Griffin. But the one who was most affected was Putnam because of his close relationship with the witcher (mentioned early in the article)

This meant that, some time later, instead of Putnam wearing his own medallion, he wore Coën's in his honour. Which was given by his companions of battle to the witches of the School of the Griffin along with other personal objects after the [Battle of Brenna](#). Wearing Coën's medallion was a way for Putnam to honor his brother and

remember the lessons he had learned from him. It also served as a reminder of the sacrifices that witchers make in their quest to protect others. Putnam's decision to wear Coën's medallion was a personal choice since he had the option to make his own medalion, but he felt that it was important to keep Coën's memory alive and to honor the bond they shared once.

In addition to Coën's medallion, Putnam also received Coën's silver sword after his death. The sword was passed down to Putnam by Gardener, who was a friend of Coën and was present at the time of his death. Gardener had promised Coën that he would give the sword to a worthy witcher to carry on his legacy. Putnam, who had a close bond with Coën and had been trained by him, was deemed worthy by Gardener to receive the sword. Putnam treasured the sword, using it in his monster-hunting work and keeping it in good condition as a tribute to deceased Griffin. In fact, it was this sword the only one he managed to keep and guard throughout his life (until the founding of the [School of the Crane](#)) losing the steel sword, given by Matlena, as a comissioned gift by Coën during his time in Ofir, which was replaced by a restored ofiri steel sword of the extinct [School of the Scorpion](#).

Trials

Putnam survived all the trials. Although in the most dangerous trials, he needed a longer recovery time than the others. Putnam's determination and willpower helped him to push through the trials, despite the challenges and difficulties he faced. He was determined to become a witcher and was willing to do whatever it took to achieve that goal. Despite the grueling nature of the trials, Putnam never gave up, even when he was at his lowest.

The Choice

He almost failed this first trial, but in the end he got it. But he acquired something of a more aggressive tendencies. Which had to be corrected with training.

Trial of the Grasses

Putnam passed The [Trial of the Grasses](#) without a problem. With the exception that he was in a coma for a while. The coma that Putnam experienced after undergoing the Trial of the Grasses lasted for nearly two weeks, which was significantly longer than the typical week-long coma that results from the

mutation process. His body remained in a state of suspended animation as it adjusted to the changes brought on by the trial. The extended duration of Putnam's coma was believed to be due to his genetics resisting the mutations, but eventually, they gave way with one notable exception: Putnam retained his previous eye color, but it deepened in intensity and took on a feline pupil, instead of the classic amber cat eyes of witches. During Putnam's coma, the School of the Griffin druids monitored his vitals closely and administered any necessary treatments. The prolonged coma and symptoms such as intermittent sweating during the almost two weeks, except for the last days, raised concerns among the witches, including the veteran Keldar, who thought Putnam might not survive. However, Putnam eventually woke up and proved to be resilient.

Trial of the Dreams

Putnam underwent the second trial of his witcher training, the [Trial of the Dreams](#), about a month after waking from his coma caused by the Trial of the Grasses. The Trial of the Dreams consisted of the ingestion of a series of hormones, along with other substances and a druidic ritual involving incense and chanting to induce in a trance the witcher trainees and provoking a series of intense and mind-altering psychedelic visions. Its purpose was to further enhance the abilities of the witches, specially the night vision, and for Putnam, it did just that - it augmented his night vision. However, as was the case for all witches, the trial also sterilized him.

During the visions, Putnam experienced a small flare-up of his Source abilities, causing objects in the room to fall. Despite the unusual occurrence, some individuals present attributed it to an accident rather than a manifestation of his powers. Of which they would only become fully aware years later.

Trial of the Pendulum

A trial that was performed shortly after the [Trial of the Dreams](#). Less dangerous than the previous ones. Rescued from the School of the Cat by [Matlena](#) during her romance with [Zamir](#). The trial helps to further improve reflexes and speed. Due to its low danger. Survivors of the [Trial of the Grasses](#) passed it easily.

Trial of the Mountains

Putnam, unlike others, came to remember quite a lot of things before the [Trial of the Grasses](#). So he passed the [Trial of the Mountains](#) without a problem.

Trial of Remembrance

More than a trial, this was a reinforcement of the studies of the witches. In that those with the best minds would go much deeper into different knowledge which were in the library of Kaer Seren.

Trial of Forest Eyes

Executed in a different way between the griffins due to the climatic conditions of Kovir but maintaining its same essence. Putnam passed this trial, coming second to Kaer Seren behind Kemro of Cintra.

Trial of the Stone Wall

Trial performed so that the witches of the School of the Griffin were able to resist more strong potions like Thunderbolt. The Trial of the Stone Wall was a test of strength, endurance, toxic resistance and brute force. Although due to the care that The Griffins were taking with the first post - avalanche generation on some matters, it was done differently for Putnam and his classmates.

Unlike the traditional version of the trial, Putnam and his classmates were not subjected to the full strength of the potions. Instead, they were gradually introduced to the potions, starting with weaker doses and gradually increasing in strength as they grew stronger and more accustomed to the effects. Despite this modification, the trial was still incredibly grueling and Putnam and his classmates had to push themselves to their limits in order to succeed.

For example, one of the obstacles in the trial was to lift a certain weight of stone and hold it for a certain amount of time, while under the influence of a potion that increased strength but also made them more aggressive, this was a test of both brute force and control. Another obstacle was to run a certain distance while under the influence of a potion that increased speed and agility, but also made them more dizzy, this was a test of endurance and resistance.

The Trial of the Journey / Contract

The last trial before graduation. A small tribute to the original trial to retrieve a Griffin egg, due to the extinction of Griffins in the area. a kind of gymkhana. This consisted of solving a series of puzzles, and obtaining a series of clues with them, all of them related to the contents of the Liber Tenebraum until obtaining an artificial egg, which one had to take back to Kaer Seren. In case the egg broke on

the way, the students had to kill their first monster to prove they were ready and bring the monster back to the fortress. Putnam broke the egg on the way, so he had to do the other option. The first monster Putnam killed was a duñak. A man-eating tree that terrorized the city of [Rakverelin](#) in [Narok](#). It would be this monster, the one who would leave the first scars on his face.

Trial of the Sword

Putnam was required to undergo the Trial of the Sword as a consequence of his alleged violation of the [Witcher´s Code](#). He was accused of acting without impartiality during the years 1276 to 1288, and underwent the trial at some point in 1289.

The conservative faction of the School of the Griffin believed that he deserved to be exiled for his actions, while another faction saw him as a valuable member of the School and felt that it would be hypocritical to exile him, given that they did not do the same with [Raven](#). Despite his actions not being completely neutral, they were seen as generally positive for the world, leading to a heated debate among the Griffins.

Keldar, mediated the debate and proposed that Putnam undergo the Trial of the Sword, which was agreed upon by both factions as a compromise. The trial involved facing several witchers in single duels, including Birrex of Poviss, Matlena, Elcon of Roseberg, Teuta, and [Rayburn of Kovir](#). If Putnam was able to defeat all of these witchers, he would be forgiven for his lack of neutrality and continue to be a part of the School of the Griffin. but if he failed, he would be exiled.

Putnam faced each witcher and witcheress in a single duel in the Trial of the Sword equipped with the heavy armor of the extinct Order of Witchers like his rivals, as tradition dictated. The duels were intense and challenging, with each opponent testing Putnam's skills, strength and witcher abilities. Taking one day each, because of how exhausting were. Despite the difficulty, Putnam emerged victorious in each duel, defeating Birrex of Poviss, Matlena, Elcon of Roseberg, Teuta and Rayburn of Kovir. With his victories, Putnam proved his worth as a witcher and was ultimately forgiven for his past lack of neutrality.

Graduation

“Remember, Putnam, a witcher's duty is never done. There will always be another

monster to hunt, another contract to fulfill.”

—Keldar to Putnam on his graduation day

January 1275. Putnam graduated with full honors. Thus he officially became a witcher of the School of the Griffin, despite the cold and Keldar's insistence that they wait until spring, otherwise they would starve to death, the newly graduated Griffins could not wait and in that same month and after they convinced Keldar to let them leave, he provided them with enough supplies to last them the two months before spring and Putnam along with his other fellow graduates would leave the school to start his first year in [The Path](#).

Reencounter with Tubiel, friendship with Fabio Sachs and The Coldwater Disaster (1275)

In the same year, several important things would happen in Putnam's life. The first would be the reunion after ten years of separation with [Tubiel of Brenna](#). Best friend of the witcher's childhood. Who had been sent to the School of the Cat, since in Kaer Seren had lost the knowledge to mutate women after the avalanche.

But sadly, Tubiel didn't get to be a complete witcheress due to the attack [Dyn Marv](#) suffered before 1272. So, she didn't possess the mutations.

Meeting in Creyden (January 20, 1275)

“You arrogant, self-righteous fool! Do you not realize the harm you've caused? That beast was suffering and I was trying to end its misery, but you just had to come in and play the hero, didn't you?”

—Tubiel of Brenna after the death of the Wereshark of Creyden

Tubiel who had been traveling alone, taking contracts since 1269, solving cases, such as that of the famous "Vengerberg Ripper" at only fourteen years old. in early 1275 She heard of a contract in the town of Tancarville, where a wereshark had been terrorizing the coast of the town. Being skilled in the art of curing curses, she decided to take on the contract and put an end to the wereshark's suffering.

As she arrived in Tancarville, she quickly got to work, tracking the wereshark to its lair and preparing to cure its curse. However, as she was in the middle of the ritual, Putnam appeared and killed the wereshark, interrupting her work. Putnam, who

had arrived a few hours later, had been hired too by the mayor to deal with the wereshark. The mayor, who had grown impatient with Tubiel's progress and feared for the safety of the town, had hired Putnam believing her to be dead. Putnam, due to his prejudice against The Cats and his belief that she would terrorize the city with the monster instead of curing or killing it in exchange for more money, acted quickly and put the beast down.

Tubiel was furious, as she had been so close to curing the wereshark's curse and ending its suffering. She kicked Putnam in the testicles, and left the lair, angry and frustrated. However, as she walked away, she couldn't help but feel a sense of familiarity with Putnam. She had seen him before, but couldn't quite place where. She decided to return to the lair, curious to know more about this witcher who had interrupted her work.

When she returned, she found Putnam recovering from her kick, and she recognized him as the witcher she had met years ago during her time with the School of the Griffin. They reconnected and reminisced about their past, and despite their initial altercation, they quickly became friends.

This encounter marked the beginning of a long and complex relationship between the two, which would change the course of their lives forever. Their friendship would deepen over time, and they would eventually fall in love and become partners, both in their witcher trade and in their personal lives.

Traveling together

After this event, the two decided to travel together, during this time they regained their lost friendship, which gradually developed into something more (although Putnam missed the hints for the most part) it was not until the events around Gradobor and in the cave that their relationship would officially become more than friendship.

Gradobor's Chimera (March 5, 1275)

Originally, they were just passing through Gradobor, heading further south where they hoped to find more work. The Third Northern War had left many dead, causing ghouls and other necrophages to become a plague, creating more work for witchers like them. However, they were forced to stay longer in the city when their horses suddenly fell ill, likely due to contaminated feed. They left their horses with a healer and searched for a contract to pay him properly. As they looked at the local board, they saw a contract for a chimera.

Throughout their time in Gradober, Putnam couldn't help but notice the way Tubiel looked at him and found excuses to be close to him, but he still didn't fully understand her feelings. Tubiel suggested to him that, knowing how dangerous a chimera was, they could "celebrate" something before going after the monster, just in case they died during the contract. Putnam didn't understand the underlying meaning behind her suggestion and told her that first, they had to pay the healer and ensure the horses were well. But, if the reward was as high as the contract stated, they could celebrate something later.

As they began to plan their approach for the chimera contract, Putnam couldn't shake the feeling that Tubiel's suggestion to celebrate meant something more than just a simple celebration. However, in the end, he didn't give it any more thought, assuming it would be something like signing up for the city's Gwent tournament or another similar activity.

The chimera had been terrorizing the local population for months, killing the animals of the outskirts farms and even some humans, and no one had been able to stop it. The town's mayor had put out a contract for any brave soul who could take down the monster. The chimera was a formidable opponent, with traits of fiends, griffins, insectoids, and wyverns, being another monster, created in Rissberg that had escaped and become a plague.

They spent several days preparing for the battle, gathering information about the monster's movements and patterns. They also stocked up ingredients for potions that Putnam would use and in Tubiel's case because her non-mutant condition, materials for traps.

Tubiel was adept at crafting traps because, lacking the biological advantages that a standard witcheress had, she had to rely on them for most of her contracts. She spent most of her time working on them. Putnam, on the other hand, spent most of his time concocting the potions that would be necessary when fighting such a dangerous creature, being one of them, Derw, which despite its high toxicity would be suitable for the combat, due to the abilities of the chimera derived from its genes.

During the preparation, Tubiel often stood close to Putnam and found excuses to touch him, such as checking that his armor was correctly fitted or had some flaw that he hadn't noticed and needed to fix. Part of it was true, but part of it was also something else. Putnam, despite feeling a little uncomfortable due to his trauma with Braith, appreciated the gesture and reciprocated with a gentle

smile, not knowing what was behind it.

Finally, the day of killing the monster had arrived. They set out before dawn, following the trail of the Chimera that they had elaborated during these days of preparation. The trail led them through the dense forest, and hills until they reached a wide open field where the Chimera had been spotted a few days earlier.

They spread out, each taking a strategic position around the field. Tubiel placed her traps carefully, while Putnam drank Derw and wait for it to take effect. They waited, watching for any sign of movement, ready to strike at a moment's notice.

As the sun began to rise, the chimera came out of its lair and let out a roar, indicating that it had detected them and they would be its next meal. Putnam lured the monster to him with a shout and hoping that the traps would slow it down sufficiently. Putnam quickly felt the effects of the potion through his body, his muscles swelled with newfound strength, and he felt his agility improve as he dodged the Chimera's initial attack. As the Chimera charged towards Putnam, he deftly sidestepped it and landed a powerful blow to its flank. The monster let out a deafening screech and turned to face him again. But with the potion coursing through his veins, Putnam was able to anticipate its movements and dodge its attacks with ease.

The chimera was a formidable foe, but Putnam was now a force to be reckoned with. His blows were heavy and well-placed, and he was able to withstand the creature's vicious counterattacks without flinching. Tubiel continued to set off her traps, which slowed the Chimera down and gave Putnam the opportunity to land a few more strikes.

As the battle raged on, the effects of the potion began to wear off, and Putnam started to feel the strain of the fight. His muscles were sore, and he was starting to feel fatigued. But he knew that he couldn't back down now; he had to finish the chimera off before it was too late.

Summoning all his remaining strength, Putnam launched himself at the chimera, his sword slicing through the air with deadly precision. With one final strike, he delivered the killing blow. However, at the last moment, the chimera managed to wound him with a powerful claw, causing both the witcher and the creature to fall to the ground.

After that, Tubiel ran to help him and check the severity of his wound, which was of medium severity. Looking for a place where she could help him rest and treat

him, she took him to the cave that had been the chimera's lair. There, she checked that there was no danger and, at the same time, burned the chimera's eggs after finding them to make a bonfire and provide better visibility. The cave was a huge place, which also connected to a subterranean lake, making it ideal for cleansing. Putnam, who was already beginning to feel the counter effects of Derw, such as fever, headaches, and muscle cramps after a long battle, added to the wound he had sustained, was not in the best condition. So, Tubiel patched him up, gave him some of Putnam's remaining Swallow potion to alleviate the counter effects, and promised to return no later than the next day since she had to walk back to Gradobor.

Upon leaving the cave, she proceeded with the usual method, cut off the monster's head and took it to the mayor. But just as she did so, a small copper plate fell from the monster's severed head, with an indication that read : CHM-001-1274-ALPHA. Tubiel took the plate and analyzed it, unable to draw any conclusions except that the chimera they had faced was not a relic from the times of Alzur and his master, but a recent creation of greater danger that loomed over everyone. She thought about telling Putnam, but she preferred not to, since it was a matter of mages, and she didn't want to put the remaining forty griffins, whom she cared for deeply, in a problem with mages again. So, she decided to investigate it on her own and try to solve the mystery by herself.

This decision would influence many things later on, including, unfortunately, the death of the Lioness of Brenna. Then, she returned to Gradobor, where she collected the reward, paid the healer for the horses, andd returned with both of them to where Putnam was.

The Cave (March 6, 1275)

*"A protector's heart, wild and free
With a noble cause, to set the wrongs right
A blade in hand, a tempest to be
A lioness in the night, a sight of might"*

—Elia Aep Bullgoh singing The Cat and The Eagle

Just as the Lioness of Brenna had promised, she returned. However, she did not arrive the next day but in the pre-dawn hours. Putnam was so exhausted that he did not even notice her arrival.

During the two months since they reunited in Tancarville, the two had been

sleeping separately, often sharing a room with separate beds if they were in an inn or, in the open air, sleeping with blankets made of bearskin or amarok. All of this was not really because of anything special, but because of the trauma of the abuse by Braith and the ten-year separation they both had experienced after Tubiel left to join The Cats. It was also influenced by Tubiel's attempted sexual abuse, which earned her the nickname "*The Lioness of Brenna*", after murdering three of her classmates at the School of the Cat and leaving Gaetan with a scar on his face.

It is for this reason, among others, that when Tubiel was offered a position at the reformed "School of the Lynx" by Lambert, she decided to turn it down. This decision was not so much because of Gaetan's presence, but due to his importance. It was not until much later, with her actions, Putnam's insistence, and Adalwulf's help, that she would be given an honorary title by the school.

But gradually, The Eagle and the Lioness, as they began to recover their lost friendship and get more and more used to each other, became closer, both physically and emotionally. Eventually, they ended up sleeping together, using the excuse of the "cold," although they didn't undress completely since they were still very inhibited with each other and that night, in that sense, was just like any other.

Not so much the day. They were both up late, with Putnam waking up late due to potion fatigue and the newly added scar and Tubiel because arriving late in the night to the cave. They went through a routine similar to the one they had when they woke up early, adapting to the fact that it was practically noon. They ate and talked about what their next course of action would be, opting for Ebbing and its swamps. They thought that they would surely find contracts there because of the danger they posed. They also asked about each other and how they were doing after fighting such an intense monster, and after that, that's where everything would start to change. Putnam went to the lake that Tubiel had told him she had seen at the bottom of the cave to bathe and clean himself, the usual thing between them, as they always used to leave that intimacy to each other. But this time, Tubiel decided to follow him soon after.

As Putnam began to disrobe, he noticed Tubiel's presence and quickly covered himself up. Tubiel apologized for following him and said she only wanted to join him in the bath. Putnam hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to proceed, but then decided to let her join him. All the abuse from Braith had played a trick on his mind, and besides, Tubiel was his friend, and they had been together back

then, in a few contracts, and he had already seen her naked, when they were kids, but naked.

As Tubiel entered the water, Putnam couldn't help but feel a slight awkwardness between them. He tried to distract himself by talking about their upcoming visit to Ebbing, but the tension remained. It wasn't until Tubiel started scrubbing his back that Putnam finally relaxed.

Feeling the warmth of the water and Tubiel's gentle touch, Putnam began to let his guard down. He realized that he had never had this type of intimacy, and it was wonderful being close to someone he trusted. As Tubiel continued to wash his back, Putnam closed his eyes and let out a contented sigh. For Tubiel, being so close to Putnam was both comforting and challenging. She had always felt a strong connection to him, but the experiences with the Cat Witchers, the sexual abuse attempt, and other things, like the murder of his father and grandfather figures, had made her a distant person, very protective of her intimacy, both physically and emotionally. To all this, we had to add her bad experiences as a fourteen year old girl who had to make a living after the fall of Dyn Marv, having seen, and done, a lot of death and destruction. Although in her case, she always tried to make the world a better place by eliminating dangerous criminals.

As Putnam let out a contented sigh, Tubiel couldn't resist leaning in a little closer, her hand lingering on his back just a little longer than necessary. She felt a shiver run through her body as she realized how much she wanted him, but she pushed those thoughts aside for the moment. For a while, they continued to wash each other in silence, enjoying the warmth of the water and the intimacy of the moment. But eventually, Tubiel couldn't contain her feelings any longer. She turned Putnam around to face her and looked into his eyes, feeling her heart racing in her chest. Putnam looked at her for a long moment, his own feelings swirling inside him. He knew that he cared deeply for Tubiel, too, but he also knew that there were a lot of obstacles in their way. But in that moment, as he looked into her eyes, he realized that he didn't want to let fear and uncertainty hold him back anymore. Without another word, he leaned in and kissed her. It was soft and gentle at first, but quickly became more passionate as they wrapped their arms around each other, lost in the moment. And in that warm, intimate embrace, they both knew that nothing would ever be the same again.

The corruption of Ebbing (May 10 - 12, 1275)

"Never thought we'd be rubbing elbows with those pricks, but if it means taking

down some real dirtbags, I'm all in."

—Tubiel of Brenna

Tubiel and Putnam continued their journey south, heading towards Ebbing and its swamps. They took a few river boat trips, helped fight against some vodyanoi, and on May 9th, they finally arrived in Ebbing. They were eager to perform contracts by eliminating swamp monsters, but their plans changed when a noblewoman named Cussi Cildi approached them at the port after noticing their medallions and asked for their help.

Cussi Cildi was a member of the Ebbing aristocracy, and she was desperate to find her missing daughter. Her daughter, Fiamma, had been kidnapped a few days before, and the local authorities had been unable to find any leads. Cussi had heard of the witchers' reputation for tracking and eliminating monsters, and she believed they were her best chance of finding her daughter.

Tubiel and Putnam listened to Cussi's story and decided to take on the contract. They followed the few leads that Cussi could provide, interviewing witnesses and tracking down rumors. As they delved deeper into the case, they discovered that Fiamma's disappearance was not an isolated incident. Other young women from the Ebbing aristocracy had gone missing under similar circumstances.

Which eventually led them to a stalemate, as all the clues pointed towards the various aristocracy parties held in Ebbing during the celebration of Fallas. That year, the festivities had been delayed due to direct orders from Emperor Emhyr, who sought to promote cultural unification in Nilfgaard, but his plans ultimately failed. However, Tubiel and Putnam soon discovered that there was more to the situation than they had initially thought. With Cussi's assistance, the Eagle and the Lioness attended the different parties in search of the truth and the missing women.

As Tubiel and Putnam attended the aristocracy parties, they began to notice a pattern among the attendees. Many of them were mages, but they did not exhibit the typical rivalry between mages; on the contrary, there seemed to be a sense of unity among them. Continuing their investigation, they discovered that the missing women had all visited these various mages at their homes and towers in the weeks leading up to their disappearances.

Tubiel and Putnam's investigation into the missing women led them to suspect that the mages were involved in the kidnappings. The witchers decided to focus their attention on the mages, trying to gather evidence against them. However, it

was not an easy task as the mages were powerful and well-connected individuals, and they had many supporters in the Ebbing aristocracy.

Despite the challenges, Tubiel and Putnam persisted in their investigation, using their skills to gather information and find clues. This led them to split up, with Putnam searching for the missing women and Tubiel discovering that the mages were part of a secret society that had been operating in Ebbing for many years.

During her investigation, Tubiel discovered to her horror that all these mages belonged to some kind of cult/sect that worshipped unknown "gods" to her. They had been using their power and influence trying "bring" these beings into the world, abducting women to use them in a series of rituals for these entities. something she did not understand, but took into account. She also discovered that the Chimera they had faced a few months before was part of this plan, to use pain of innocent people as a "source of power".

This realization made the Lioness of Brenna even more concerned about the situation, and she became more determined to protect Putnam and continue to investigate it alone. As a result, she decided to continue hiding information to ensure his safety.

Putnam, unaware of the depth of Tubiel's investigation, focused solely on finding the missing women. He used his tracking skills to follow leads and gather information about their whereabouts. After one day of searching, he finally discovered a lead that led him to an abandoned mansion on the outskirts of Claremont.

Putnam approached the abandoned mansion cautiously, staying hidden in the shadows as he scouted the area. As he drew closer, he could see that the entrance to the mansion was guarded by the massive creature, which seemed to be a crossbreed between an orc and a werewolf. Its thick fur bristled in the wind, and its glowing yellow eyes scanned the area for any signs of intruders.

Putnam knew that he couldn't take the creature on alone, and so he retreated to a safe distance to come up with a plan. He considered his options carefully, knowing that time was of the essence and that the missing women could be in grave danger.

After a few moments of contemplation, Putnam decided to try to lure the creature away from the mansion. He moved quickly and quietly, using his knowledge of the terrain to his advantage. He used a combination of decoys and clever distractions to draw the creature's attention away from the mansion and

into the nearby woods.

Once the creature was far enough away from the mansion, Putnam made his move. He sprinted towards the entrance and prepared for a fight. He charged towards the creature, swinging his silver sword. The creature roared in response, and its massive jaws snapped at Putnam as it tried to defend itself. Putnam dodged and zigzagged, and his sword pierced the creature's thick hide. The battle was fierce and brutal, but in the end Putnam emerged victorious, albeit with a new scar in the area of his blue eye. The creature fell to the ground and its body writhed in pain before succumbing to its wounds.

With the creature defeated, Putnam cautiously entered the mansion. He searched the rooms one by one, looking for any sign of the missing women. As he explored the dark and dusty halls, he could feel the weight of Tubiel's absence, knowing that he could have used her help in this situation. Finally, after what seemed like hours of searching, Putnam found a hidden chamber in the mansion's basement. Inside, he discovered the missing women, all of them dead and tortured. Putnam felt a pang of sadness that he had not been able to save any of them, but at least he had defeated the being he believed was responsible. Therefore, he took Cussi's daughter's body and brought her to her mother.

Tubiel, for her part, lied about who was responsible. He decided to hide the information that it was probably the mages, and told Cussi that it was simply bandits who were responsible for the kidnappings. This was reinforced by the version that Putnam innocently told. The lie about the Orc -Werewolf Crossbreed being the bandit leader was simply a means of reinforcing the bandit story and making it more believable. Putnam, who had been focused on the less complex aspects of the contract, was easily convinced by Tubiel's explanation. He had no reason to doubt her and accepted her version of events without question.

Ultimately, Tubiel's decision to lie was motivated by her concern for the safety of those around her. She knew that the truth could have serious consequences and she did not want to put anyone in harm's way. Despite the deception, Tubiel acted with the best intentions.

After that, they collected the money stipulated in the contract, and left Ebbing in search of new destinations. But Tubiel's mind still couldn't shake the idea that there was something very serious behind all this and she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

The Coldwater Disaster (June, 1275)

*"The moon is high, the stars are bright
But danger lies just out of sight
So hush now child, and dream away
Before the Witcher comes to play"*

—Naeda Ulvenson singing about the "Coldwater Disaster"

After their stay in Ebbing, the couple decided to take a ship and return north. It wasn't so much Putnam's decision as it was Tubiel's. She had concerns and wanted to get some distance from the shady business she had uncovered about the mages, at least for a while. She needed to think and take a course of action since many doubts were consuming her, especially those concerning Putnam's safety. It was during this month that the first breakup between the two began to take shape, although it would not manifest itself until many months later, in October.

Back to the simple life, basically, so Cintra served them well. Besides, they had enough work dealing with ghouls plus other necrophages, and the Nilfgaardians, paid them very well. It was perfect, except for the fact that it wasn't. Putnam noticed that Tubiel was acting strangely, too worried. It caused him to worry, even though Tubiel told him everything was fine. This emotional situation was one of the factors that influenced what would later be called The Coldwater Disaster.

This tragic event occurred after Tubiel had broken her arm during one of their contracts. As a result, when Putnam was given the contract to free the village of Coldwater from a curse, Tubiel, who had more knowledge about how to cure curses, could not accompany him. However, Tubiel didn't just stay recovering. Her mind kept racing, thinking about the influence that sect of mages would have. While Putnam went off to complete the contract, she took the opportunity to continue her research, which led her to meet again with two women whom she considered her sister and older sister. She had maintained a moderately stable relationship with them after the deaths of Guxart and Gwidon, which had led her to move away from the rest of the school: [Jolanta of Brunwich](#) and [Mozeh of Verden](#). Tubiel asked them for help with her research and didn't hide anything from them because of the nature of their school. After all, she needed Mozeh's expertise and Jolanta's contacts to make progress.

Putnam traveled to Coldwater alone, and the task proved to be more challenging

than he had anticipated. The curse that plagued the village was strong, and it took him various hours to find the source of it. He finally found out that the origin of the curse was a plague of Mahrs, which had infected all the inhabitants.

Putnam began the ritual to expel the Mahrs, an upscaled version of the usual exorcism to drive them away, the Mahrs began to band together and prepare to prevent the witcher from succeeding. This caused the madness of the villagers to intensify, and many of them began to break out of their homes. Putnam tried to maintain his focus and complete the ritual, but he was soon forced to defend himself from the attacking villagers. As the night wore on, the Mahrs' illusions became even more intense, causing Putnam to lose all sense of reality. He began to see the infected villagers as monstrous beasts, and in a fit of madness, he drew his sword and began to attack. By the time the Nilfgaardian soldiers that guarded that village and hired Putnam, arrived, he had slaughtered every last inhabitant of the village. Although Putnam had ended the curse and killed the Mahrs, he had left the village in ruins, and its peaceful inhabitants were no more.

An act that even for soldiers, who had seen everything in the Third Northern War, seemed monstrous. Still, it had solved the problem, so they paid him the agreed upon amount, and Putnam took the money, ashamed and guilty about how everything had turned out, and left. Soon, the soldiers began to talk with other people about the Cold Water Disaster, and stories started to be told and songs created. The lullaby "He who lurks in the dark" by Naeda Ulvenson became the most famous of these, supposedly narrating the events that happened in village most faithfully.

This event had a profound psychological impact on Putnam and was one of the causes that delayed the healing of his Survivor Syndrome and other psychological problems much longer than usual.

Summer in Toussaint (July - October 1275)

After being reunited, Putnam and Tubiel traveled to the southern duchy of Toussaint. They were captivated by the love they shared, the beauty of the region, and the ample opportunities for work. They decided to spend the summer and part of autumn there, from July to October, roaming the valley and residing in the capital city of Beauclair, despite Tubiel's objections. Who was tired of the posh people of the capital and their patronization. Overall, it was practically a "vacation" for both of them. Where they were able to connect even more with each other. With some noteworthy moments, such as the contract of

Pepa, a [Werepig](#) from Beauclair who had murdered almost her entire family, except for her little brother Jorge, whom Tubiel and Putnam managed to save. But not much more. The most remarkable, would come in mid-summer, when they would both travel to the city of Corvo

Fighting Cervin for a basilisk contract

During their stay in Toussaint, approximately in August, Putnam and Tubiel visited the city of Corvo for both work purposes and at Tubiel's insistence, who had a contact provided by Jolanta there, who could assist her with her research of the sect of mages , although she kept this information from Putnam. While Tubiel was visiting her contact, Putnam was hired for a job to kill a basilisk that had taken up residence in the cellars of a noblewoman named Agnes de Rossa. Unfortunately, Agnes had not removed the job posting in time, and another witcher from the School of the Bear, [Cervin](#), had also applied for the job.

The two witches had a conflict-ridden past due to their differing upbringings and the longstanding tension between their respective schools. When they were both assigned to the same job, the situation escalated, leading to a confrontation that almost resulted in a fatal fight. Fortunately, Agnes was able to intervene and stop the altercation before it got out of hand. She had enjoyed a successful year of wine production and was able to pay more for the contract, which prompted both witches to stop fighting. However, due to the fact that both Putnam and Cervin had broken their arms during the fight, they were forced to work together, albeit reluctantly.

Despite their initial animosity, Putnam and Cervin were able to come together and successfully defeat the basilisk. They were both paid for the job and decided to split the reward equally between them. However, the cost of their injuries from the fight and the subsequent medical attention required to heal left them with little of the reward. Despite this, both witches gained valuable insight into the importance of teamwork and cooperation, especially when facing a dangerous and formidable adversary. This experience taught them that their personal differences and the long-standing tensions between their respective schools should not get in the way of completing a job and protecting those in need. The two witches parted ways after their successful mission, with a newfound respect for one another and a better understanding of the value of cooperation.

Separation of paths / the first breakup (October, 1275)

Although everything was going perfectly for both of them, and Tubiel had been able to forget her worries for a while, since their visit to Corvo, they started to come back more and more. At first, as a gentle reminder that the threat was still latent, but eventually it became more intense and her paranoia and concern grew. After all, although they had not solved the problem of the kidnapped women in Ebbing in the best way, they had solved it. And she had found out things about them, she had tried to be as cautious as possible. But what if she had made a mistake and now they were after them? Those kinds of questions, plus other thoughts, like how biologically different the two of them were regarding aging, plagued her all through September and into October.

So sooner rather than later, Tubiel decided that the best thing, not for herself but to protect him, was to break up. However, she didn't dare to do it outright. So, one day, like any other, when Putnam woke up, he saw that she was gone and that there was only a letter and a bag of coins. Putnam's experience with Tubiel's sudden departure had a profound impact on him, leaving him feeling hurt, confused, and abandoned. He couldn't understand why she would leave without a proper explanation, and the fact that she left behind a bag of coins only added to his confusion. Was she paying him off? Was it her way of saying she no longer needed him?

As he tried to make sense of it all, he began to develop a coping mechanism of his own - the idea that leaving his partners before they could leave him would somehow protect him from being hurt again. It was a subconscious way for him to gain control over a situation that had left him feeling helpless and vulnerable. Although prior to 1280, this was also influenced by his feelings for her, and his not being able to forget her with another woman. Cases such as Trill, Radeyah or Makeda.

However, after Tubiel's death and his own survival, Putnam's coping mechanism reached a whole new level. His survivor's guilt consumed him, causing him to believe that by leaving his partners before anything could happen to him or them, he was somehow protecting them. It was his way of taking control of his own fate and ensuring that he wouldn't have to experience the pain of loss again.

As a result, Putnam began to repeat the same pattern of behavior he learned from Tubiel. He would leave his partners suddenly and without explanation, often leaving them feeling hurt and confused, just as he had felt when Tubiel left him. He even abandoned Jolanta and Marina, whom he deeply loved, in the

same way.

Meeting Fabio and breaking neutrality (November, 1275)

After his breakup with Tubiel, the witcher, heartbroken, decided to return to Kaer Seren. After all, it was already October, and the journey from Toussaint to the fortress would be long and complicated. He needed to be there more than ever. It had been a year filled with emotions and experiences, and he needed time to meditate. It was during this trip that he made a brief stop in Novigrad. He barely had any work and was starving.

There, as he went to the cheapest tavern he could find, that being The Purple Rose located in the city's Red District, two men approached him. Later, they were revealed to be part of the Novigrad Security Bureau, and they made him an offer. The Flame Bats, a criminal gang that had taken advantage of the power vacuum left by the Big Four, had escaped to the city of Oxenfurt before their heads could be brought to justice, and unfortunately, the Bureau had no jurisdiction in that city.

The men offered Putnam a handsome sum of crowns to help them take down the Flame Bats and bring them to justice, as their main asset for those matters, whom Putnam would meet several years later, Jolanta, was recovering from the last contract. Putnam agreed, after all, he hadn't eaten for days, and money was scarce, bordering on non-existent. Thus, having to break his neutrality for the first time. To his misfortune, he had lost the money Tubiel had left him after a disastrous game of Gwent. From then on, he hated the card game. And despite having been paid fully in advance, like the good Griffin he was, he decided not to run away and fulfill the contract.

He arrived in Oxenfurt and immediately began his investigation. It didn't take him long to track down the gang's hideout, in the sewers of the city and after some reconnaissance work, he realized that the best approach would be a surprise attack in the middle of the night. Fabio Sachs, on the other hand, was having a disastrous day that day. He had slept terribly, was sick to his stomach, and to top it all off, as the sun was setting and he was returning to his residence in the city from the Faculty of History and Geography to review more details of his master's thesis at home, it flew out because of the wind and fell into the sewers. Fabio had to retrieve it, adding to his misfortunes. But what he didn't know was that Destiny would have the surprise of meeting his best friend.

As Fabio Sachs was making his way through the sewers to retrieve his lost thesis,

he suddenly heard the sound of scuffling and snarling up ahead. He soon realized that he was not alone in the sewers, and to his horror, a group of wererats had emerged from the shadows and were closing in on him. Fabio Sachs was filled with terror as he tried to fend off the wererats. He had heard tales of the vicious creatures, but had never imagined he would have to face them himself. Despite his fear, he managed to hold his own for a short while, dodging and blocking the creatures' attacks as best he could. But it was clear that he was no match for them, and he was quickly being overwhelmed. Just as he thought all hope was lost, a figure emerged from the darkness, brandishing a silver sword. It was none other than Putnam, who after dealing with the gang ad stumbled upon the wererats by chance. He quickly dispatched the monsters, saving Fabio from certain death.

After the battle, Fabio was gasping for breath and still trembling from the adrenaline rush. He felt lucky to be alive, and grateful to Putnam for his professionalism. The two emerged from the sewers and began to strike up a conversation as they caught their breath. Fabio lamented about losing his thesis, telling Putnam how much work he had put into it, and how he had hoped to finish it soon. Putnam listened attentively and sympathized with his plight.

As they walked through the city street, they decided to go to a nearby tavern to celebrate that they were still alive. As the night wore on, they found themselves sharing stories and laughing, enjoying each other's company. Fabio was surprised at how easy it was to talk to Putnam, and how much he enjoyed his company. He had always been a solitary person, content with his books and research, but something about Putnam drew him out of his shell.

As they left the tavern, the sky was beginning to lighten with the dawn, and they both realized they had been talking and drinking for hours. They exchanged contact information and made plans to meet up again. What neither of them knew at the time was that this encounter would be the beginning of a long and lasting friendship that would transform The Continent forever.

First winter as a full witcher in Kaer Seren (December 1275 - March 1276)

"Hey, hey, it's so good to see you guys! Can you believe it's been a whole frickin' year since we started on the Path? How've you been holding up against those

creepy crawlies and gnarly monsters out there? Any close calls or epic battles to brag about? By the way, do you think Keldar will be angry if I tell him that I almost died from potion poisoning?"

—Putnam to [Kemro of Cintra](#) and [Zivor of Redania](#) after arriving at Kaer Seren

Although still hurt by Tubiel's breakup, Putnam tried not to dwell on it and focused on spending a pleasant winter with the remaining thirty-nine witchers who made up the School of the Griffin. He considered them his family and in a way, I couldn't deny that I had missed them.

He spent his days sparring with his brothers in arms, sharing stories of their recent hunts, and enjoying hearty meals in the great hall. The harsh winter outside seemed to fade away as they laughed and joked together. From time to time, they would receive a scolding from Keldar for various reasons, especially for silly mistakes they might have made on a contract. However, they understood that the grumpy old witcher did it because he cared for and loved them.

This winter, it served him well to heal a little from the breakup with Tubiel, although he could never forget it. At first, he tried to keep his composure and not even mention her, but eventually, as the days went by, he could not help but do so. One day, while playing chess with Vargos and getting drunk in the process, they inadvertently ended up drifting their conversation to complaining about women. As Keldar passed by to chastise them for being drunk so early in the morning, he overheard Tubiel mentioned. Revealing to Putnam that Jerome encountered her as he was returning to the fortress, apparently heading as far south as [Melukka](#). This would stick in Putnam's mind and mark his next destination the following year.

Also one evening, while playing cards with Artegal of Kovir and waiting for the dinner, Putnam shared his desire to travel south to find Tubiel. Artegal listened intently and then shared some news he had heard about the situation in Skellige. Rumors that a sorceress had attempted a coup, that a witcher from the School of the Bear had been arrested, that an order of werebear warriors had reappeared, that sea monster attacks had been reported, etc....Apparently, because of all of this, the people of the islands were paying handsomely for killing monsters. This sparked an idea in Putnam's mind - he could travel to Skellige to earn some coin, and then continue further south in search of Tubiel. With a plan forming in his mind, Putnam eagerly awaited the end of winter and the opportunity to set out on his journey.

Romance with Calina and travel to Skellige and Melukka (1276)

“Melukka, my dear friend, is a land of endless wonders and possibilities. From the rolling hills to the sandy beaches, there's always something to discover. And let me tell you, the people there know how to enjoy life! The food, the drink, the music...ah, it's like nowhere else in the world.”

—Tunak Bhangra talking about Melukka to a client

Once winter had ended, Putnam bid farewell to his fellow witches and set off to carry out his plans. He initially boarded a ship that was supposed to sail directly from Lan Exeter to Skellige, but due to a sudden storm, the ship was forced to make a slight detour and ended up running aground in the port city of Cidaris, located in the kingdom of the same name.

This unfortunate turn of events was only compounded by the fact that the journey had already cost him dearly due to his mutant status. Unlike other clients, Putnam had not been granted a free trip or food once the ship was repaired. The owner believed that Putnam's condition had brought him bad luck, and that the stranding was a punishment from the gods. Putnam felt a sting of resentment at the unfairness of it all, but he did not allow himself to dwell on it. Instead, he resolved to make the best of his situation and set out to explore the city.

Cidaris, especially its famous seaside bazaar was a bustling hub of trade, with its markets full of exotic goods from far-off lands. Putnam found himself drawn to the merchants selling rare spices and textiles, and spent hours haggling with them in the marketplace. Although he couldn't get anyone to sell him anything at a price he could afford.

As Putnam was walking through the bazaar,
Destiny had something else in store for him.

He caught sight of a beautiful bourgeois merchant named Calina, who had just inherited her father's business. Calina was grieving the loss of his progenitor, who had been killed by a rimpler. Putnam saw an opportunity to take advantage of her grief, as money was tight and he needed to get to Skellige. He began to seduce her with his charm and good looks, knowing full well that he could use her to get a free trip. Calina was naive and vulnerable, and Putnam saw this as an easy target. He spun tales of adventure and danger, painting himself as a hero who had slain countless monsters and saved countless lives, despite having only

been a witcher for a year. It was one of the witcher's worst acts, though not all bad, for despite seducing her to get the trip, he found the nest of the rimpler that had murdered her father and killed it and its offspring.

After killing the monster, Putnam spent more time with Calina. Their short visits gradually turned into hour-long meetings, and then they began having lunch and dinner together. Eventually, their visits turned into all-nighters. After a week of courting her, Putnam finally got what he wanted: a free permit for one of Calina's merchant ships to take him to the islands. Putnam felt some remorse for taking advantage of the girl, but he knew the trip was important, and he would rather take advantage of her than stow away on a ship and risk losing his horse and belongings.

Finally, after a week of courting, Putnam and Calina had a night of passion. However, Calina's happiness was short-lived as her uncle paid her a surprise visit. He was concerned about the business she had inherited and urged her to marry a nobleman of the kingdom for the sake of their financial stability. Despite her protests, since the laws of Cidaris allowed him to do so, he threatened to cut off her inheritance if she did not comply with his wishes.

A few hours later that day, as Putnam and Calina were spending time together, her uncle unexpectedly arrived at the house again, and caught them in a compromising position. He was outraged and demanded that Putnam leave immediately, threatening to have him arrested and hanged for seducing his niece. Putnam had no choice but to flee, leaving behind most of his belongings with the exception of his swords and his medallion. Escaping half-naked with his horse.

Despite the humiliation of his escape, Putnam was relieved to have avoided the noose and set sail for Skellige with the permit. Then Putnam realized that he had made a mistake by taking advantage of Calina's vulnerability and naivety. He felt guilty for his actions. As he set sail towards the islands, Putnam reflected on his behavior and resolved to be more honest in his dealings with others in the future. He knew that being a mutant made his life difficult, but he also knew that it was no excuse for his behavior. Putnam realized that he needed to work harder to gain people's trust and respect, and that the best way to do that was to be true to his word and act with integrity. Something that would be reflected in his personality later on with his sincerity, which he would maintain fairly consistently, even after certain tragic events that would leave a lasting mark on him.

Time in Skellige (April - June 1276)

*"Putnam gátar skrímslið á vitjan,
Móður jörð hjálpar honum í óvissuna,
Hann sigraði skrímslið og orðrómur spáði hans frægð."*

—Krimdi "fast hands" - Saga of the Dark Clouds : Song of the Black Demon

During his trip to the islands, prior to his arrival, the witcher, due to his bad state after everything that had happened with Calina, honed his skills in playing Dice Poker. As a result, he obtained fairly decent equipment from mercenaries and some money from gambling, making it a pastime for him, as much as Gwent was for other witches.

Upon arriving at the harbor of Ard Skellig and disembarking from the ship, he verified the truth of what Aregal had said by checking the port bulletin board, which was full of contracts. He spent some time reviewing and taking the contracts until he was interrupted by a woman who appeared to be a priestess of Freyja, but was actually the local sorceress and advisor to the queen, named Evelyn Ruach.

Evelyn was very different from all the other sorceresses, which made Putnam, at the time, more accepting of her. As a novice witcher who had grown up with the anti-mage prejudices of the reconstructed Kaer Seren due to the tragedy, he found her humility and simplicity refreshing. Although she was beautiful, like all sorceresses, she did not dress stunning or wear makeup that emphasized a lot her beauty, but instead dressed modestly in simple clothing. Evelyn, and her influence, would become key, not only to the development of his future faith in the goddess Freyja, but also to Putnam's acceptance of mages on Fabio expeditions, such as Istredd or Eberhatt. Also, it is worth mentioning, that his time on the islands and the work he did there would influence in the creation of the [School of the Crane](#) many years later.

Truth be told, that encounter was quite fortuitous. Evelyn had no recruitment plans at the port; she was just passing by and happened to notice the witcher. She used to stop by the port from time to time due to a personal tragedy that left her emotionally scarred. Evelyn had mistaken him for someone else related to this tragic event, which is why she interrupted him. After that, the two talked and began to get to know each other. Putnam explained his situation, and Evelyn explained hers. She told him that she too was new to the area, having returned

to her homeland after many years. She had replaced a sorceress who had tried to stage a coup with a witcher. She had only been there for a few months, but suggested that the crown might need his help and pay him well. However, she would have to discuss it with the queen first.

In the meantime, Putnam kept himself occupied by fulfilling contracts, mainly those involving nixas, which were abundant in the area. Meanwhile, Evelyn had a discussion with Cerys, and after much debate due to the queen's stubbornness and the events that had occurred with Cervin and Herna the previous year, they eventually came to an agreement. If the witcher could prove his worth and honesty by completing various contracts, they would then ask for his help to solve the problem with the Vildkaarls. The Vildkaarls were killing many people and attempting to stage a new coup d'état, but due to their power, the crown was powerless to stop them. So, Evelyn was sent to be with the witcher, to effectively check if he was someone trustworthy.

The Black Demon of Hindarsfjall

"Trust is not easily earned, especially in our line of work. But I have a feeling that you are different, Putnam. You carry yourself with a certain level of honor and integrity that is hard to find these days. Let's work together and see if my intuition is correct."

—Evelyn trying to convince Putnam to let her go with him to the Black Demon contract.

After a long month of work, things were calming down, and the nixas' plagues were reducing enough to not be a problem in the coasts and nearby waters of the islands. Then, Putnam, received the two most important contracts of that year, that would also give him a certain amount of local fame. Although his more general fame in The Continent would not come about until two years later, Putnam was known after that month in Ard Skellig for being a reasonable person to work with and count on, willing to help in any way he could. This reputation was thanks to the locals who spoke highly of him, saying that "the mainlander" (since no one believed he was from the islands, no matter how much he pretended with his fake accent at that time) had honesty, integrity, and a strong work ethic. Which had been "exaggerated" by Putnam during that time, due to what happened with Calina, as a way of purging and repentance.

As time went on, Putnam and Evelyn had occasional meetings, which seemed fortuitous, but were, in fact, planned by the sorceress, who kept a closer eye on

him than Putnam would have thought. Evelyn's atypical attitude with respect to other sorceresses and her more maternal demeanor prevented Putnam, influenced by his naivety, from having any suspicions about her true intentions.

Despite their initial meetings being strategic, Putnam and Evelyn had gradually grown closer and become good friends. Evelyn saw Putnam's skills as a witcher, as well as his personal qualities, and she began to report to the queen that he was someone to be trusted. Thanks to Evelyn's reports, the queen was gradually convinced that Putnam was a valuable ally.

When news of a sea monster prowling the coast of Hindarsfjall arrived, Putnam went there to put an end to the problem. Evelyn convinced Putnam to let her go with him to help kill the monster. Putnam was initially hesitant to let Evelyn come along on the contract, as he did not want anything to happen to her. However, he eventually agreed to let her join him, as he believed that she genuinely wanted to help and that her knowledge of the islands, plus her magical abilities, could be useful in the confrontation.

During their journey to Hindarsfjall, Evelyn proved to be a valuable companion. She used her knowledge of the area to help Putnam navigate the waters and dodge their first encounters with the monster, which almost killed them. They both knew, that with a lot of effort, they could defeat it by themselves, but they preferred not to risk it and get more help. So, once ashore, they proceeded to seek help heading to the village Larvirk.

In Larvik, Putnam and Evelyn discovered that the villagers had been suffering from attacks by the sea monster for weeks, and many were already killed and eated by the [Black Demon](#) or injured. They immediately offered their services and soon, with the help of the villagers, they formulated a plan to take down the monster. With Putnam's theoretical knowledge of the creature, and his charisma, he convinced the village fishermen to join him and prepare harpoons.

Putnam's plan was simple: bait the monster into attacking the ship of the fishermen the next time they went out for a fishing trip then strike it with the harpoons, and finally, deliver the killing blow. While Evelyn used her magical abilities to create a barrier around the boat, protecting the fishermen from the monster's attacks. The plan was risky, but it was the best option they had to take down the monster without putting too many lives at risk.

The next day, the fishermen set out to sea, with Putnam and Evelyn on board.

They used a live sheep as bait, which attracted the monster to the boat. As soon as the monster attacked, Putnam and the fishermen began to strike it with the harpoons, while Evelyn maintained the magical barrier to keep the monster from attacking the boat. The harpoons misfired, due to the creature's intelligence, so Putnam opted to throw a bomb at it to at least stun it. But a sudden movement of the ship, while the creature was approaching, caused the bomb to slip and fall into the water eated moments later by the creature, everyone thought at that moment, that they had failed and would die there, but it exploded inside. The explosion was so powerful that it killed the monster instantly, causing its body to float to the surface. Putnam and the fishermen were ecstatic, as they had finally managed to put an end to the monster's reign of terror.

As they returned to the village, they were met with cheers and applause from the grateful villagers. The fishermen praised them for their bravery in taking down the monster. Putnam humbly accepted their praise, but he knew that he could not have done it without Evelyn's help. As a reward for their heroic actions, the villagers held a feast in honor of Putnam and Evelyn, Putnam also received a handsome sum of coin from the village elder, although the death of monsters at that time was not as well paid as in the past, the Black Demon had been such a terrible being that he deserved that sum of ducats, the elder also declared him a hero and promised to spread the news of his deed throughout the islands. Time later, the elder of Larvik would fulfill his promise and hired the Skald Krimdi "fast hands" which would compose a whole saga inspired by the witcher and his actions in Skellige entitled "The Saga of the Dark Clouds" with an entire song, dedicated to the killing of the Black Demon.

After their success in Hindarsfjall, Putnam and Evelyn returned to Ard Skellig and over time, they grew even more closer, and their friendship turned into something more. However, they both knew that their work as witcher and sorceress would always come first.

The tentacles in Spikeroog

After returning to Ard Skellig, Putnam continued to help the island's population and occasionally moved to other islands as needed. Thanks to Evelyn, the queen had come to trust the witcher more and more, but felt that he lacked something to fully prove himself worthy of her trust. Meanwhile, as her relationship with Putnam evolved from friendship to something more, Evelyn became increasingly insistent that he was the one who could help put an end to the Vildkaarls.

Moreover, the attacks by the warrior order grew more frequent and intense. So, sooner rather than later, at the end of that same month of May, the test came that would make him totally worthy of the ruler of Skellige's trust: a contract in the waters of Spikeroog to hunt one of the Great Sea's most fearsome creatures, a kraken.

Regarding the witcher's relationships, his relationship with Evelyn was nice and quite healthy, despite its short duration and the fact that they never clarified what they were. The reason for this lack of clarification was that they had to keep it secret; if Cerys found out, she would no longer trust Evelyn's word, and as mentioned before, her duty as a sorceress came first. Despite the challenges they faced in keeping their relationship a secret, they found ways to spend time together whenever possible. They would often sneak away from their duties in passionate nights hiding from everyone or sharing quiet moments together, walking along the cliffs or sitting by the sea, lost in conversation.

Evelyn taught the witcher many things that would end up shaping him as a person. As mentioned, for example, she influenced his adoption of the belief in the goddess Freyja, although more as a personal philosophy than as a religion. While Evelyn was not a priestess, her clothing suggested a simple and devout lifestyle, and during their conversations, she ended up influencing Putnam's beliefs. Years later, he found solace and comfort in his faith towards the goddess.

Another aspect that Evelyn influenced in the witcher was his compassion. She was not the only one who shaped Putnam's unique compassion; others like Tubiel and Aine also played a role. However, Evelyn's influence was the most significant. Interestingly, centuries later, Fabiola's priests would mark Putnam's relationship with Evelyn as the beginning of the process of his sanctification. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, despite not becoming a saint, Evelyn would later be beatified by the cult of Freyja.

They were informed of the situation on the other island in good condition, thanks to an emissary of Clan Brokvar who had gone to talk to Cerys, and both of them left for Spikeroog immediately. As they sailed towards Spikeroog, Putnam and Evelyn encountered some of the roughest waters they had ever experienced. The waves were so high that they towered above the deck of their ship, a hybrid between a Cintran Merchant Ship and a local Knarr, from the time when Skellige and Cintra were united by the marriage of their monarchs, crashing down with a deafening roar. The winds howled, driving rain and spray into their faces, stinging their eyes and chilling them to the bone.

Despite the treacherous conditions, the sailors of the ship were skilled and experienced, and they managed to navigate the vessel through the worst of the storm. They huddled together on the deck, clutching ropes and clinging to the rigging as the ship pitched and rolled beneath them. Every now and then, a particularly large wave would strike the vessel, causing it to shudder and lurch violently.

The journey was long and grueling, and Putnam and Evelyn spent much of their time below deck, trying to stay warm and dry. They huddled together in a small cabin, wrapped in blankets and listening to the creaking and groaning of the ship as it battled against the elements. After what seemed like an eternity, the ship finally arrived at Spikeroog. The island loomed dark and foreboding in the distance, and as they drew closer, they could see the wreckage of ships littering the coastline.

Putnam stood at the bow of the ship, his eyes scanning the horizon for any sign of the kraken. He knew the creature was a formidable opponent and not to be underestimated. As he watched the waves crash against the hull of the ship, he couldn't help but wonder what had brought the kraken so close to shore. He had heard stories of merpeople, specially Sea Witches who controlled the Great Sea monsters, and wondered if they had any part in this. Perhaps they were angry with the humans for hunting one of their own, or maybe it was something else entirely. Whatever the reason, Putnam knew that they had to be cautious.

As they approached the island, the sailors began to prepare for battle, securing the ship and readying their weapons. Putnam, meanwhile, consulted a copy of the Liber Tenebrarum that Keldar gave him before he left the fortress and prepared his own arsenal, which included the potion of Superior Killer Whale to last longer underwater, in case he had to do so, and Evelyn, going over from memory, some spell that could help them finish with the fearsome monster.

Putnam and Evelyn made their way to the shore in a small boat, accompanied by a handful of skilled sailors armed with crossbows and harpoons. They landed on the rocky shore, and as they approached the cliffs, they could see the kraken's massive tentacles flailing in the water below. The creature was enormous, easily the size of four small ships putting together one above the other, and it was surrounded by a swirling mass of smaller sea creatures that seemed to be drawn to its presence.

Putnam had heard stories of the kraken that threatened the city of Cidaris and its fleet, but this did not seem like that case. It seemed more like the kraken was searching the island for a culprit, and when it did not find one, it destroyed everything within reach, especially the ships, in revenge.

Putnam could feel his heart racing as he approached the edge of the cliff, his eyes fixed on the creature below. He knew that they had to act quickly if they wanted to have any chance of defeating it. Evelyn, meanwhile, was preparing a spell, her hands glowing with a soft blue light as she chanted under her breath. Putnam drank his potion of Superior Killer Whale, feeling the effects coursing through his veins.

With a deep breath, Putnam leaped from the cliff, plunging into the water below. He could feel the cold embrace of the sea, but his enhanced senses allowed him to see clearly even in the murky depths. He swam towards the kraken, dodging its massive tentacles as they thrashed about wildly. The sailors on the shore above fired their crossbows and hurled their harpoons, distracting the creature and drawing its attention away from the witcher.

As Putnam approached the kraken, he drew his silver sword and struck at its tentacles with all his might. His blade sliced through the flesh like butter, and the kraken let out a deafening roar of pain and fury. But it was not enough to stop the beast, and it retaliated with a powerful wave of its tentacles, knocking Putnam off-balance and sending him tumbling through the water.

Evelyn's spell was ready, and she cast it with a powerful burst of magic. A bright beam of light shot from her hands, striking the kraken directly in one of its two massive eyes. The creature let out another roar, writhing in agony as it was momentarily blinded. This gave Putnam the opportunity he needed, and he swam towards the beast's head, his silver sword flashing in the water.

With a final, mighty blow, Putnam drove his sword deep into the kraken's brain. The creature convulsed one final time, and then it was still. The sea creatures that had been drawn to the kraken's presence scattered, disappearing back into the depths of the Great Sea.

Putnam surfaced, gasping for breath, and climbed back onto the shore. He collapsed onto the rocky ground, his body aching from the exertion of the battle. Evelyn rushed to his side, her face etched with concern. But he managed to smile weakly, feeling a deep sense of satisfaction and pride at having defeated such a fearsome foe.

As Putnam was recovering from the battle he knew that the investigation was far from over. The kraken's attacks had left the island in shambles, and they needed to find out why it had happened. Evelyn, who always seemed to be one step ahead of everyone else, began to interrogate the sailors and locals in the hopes of finding some answers.

Her sharp mind and clever questions soon began to yield results. One sailor, a grizzled old sea dog with a missing eye, claimed that he had seen the kraken attacking a group of ships a few days prior to its assault on the island. According to him, the kraken had been acting strangely, attacking ships that were far outside of its usual hunting grounds.

Another local, a fisherman named Cratr, claimed that he had seen strange lights in the water on the night before the attack to Spikeroog. He was convinced that there was something supernatural at work, and that the kraken was merely a pawn in some larger scheme.

As the days passed and Putnam joined the interrogations, more and more people came forward with their own theories and suspicions. Some claimed that it was seeking revenge for some past injustice. Still, others believed that it was merely hungry and had attacked the island out of desperation.

Evelyn and Putnam listened carefully to each story, weighing the evidence and trying to piece together the truth, and finally, they found it. The mage and the witcher discovered that a local fisherman had accidentally killed a siren while out at sea. The siren's death had angered the kraken, who had served as the siren's loyal companion and protector. In retaliation, the kraken decided to follow and kill the fisherman who had killed the siren, and not finding him, it had retaliated by destroying everything it could. Just as the witcher originally suspected.

Evelyn and Putnam shared their findings with the local authorities and urged them to spread the word to the fishermen. The fishermen then decided to perform a ritual to calm the waters. Putnam thought it was silly since the monster was already dead, but he never commented on it. He had done his job. Putnam then met with Udalryk an Brokvar, the jarl of the island, the one who had placed the contract and had sent the information about the problem with the kraken to the rest of the archipelago, collected the money that had been offered for the contract, a good sum that would allow him to do several things in the future, and marched back to Ard Skellig with Evelyn.

Attempted coup d'état by the Vildkaarls

After what happened on the island ruled by the Clan Brokvar, Evelyn and Putnam returned to Ard Skellig. The news of the kraken's attack quickly reached Cerys, and she was impressed with the witcher's behavior. Having already received confirmation of her trust in him, she summoned him to Kaer Trolde after discussing it with Evelyn.

The witcher accepted, feeling honored that the queen had sent for him. Although he was a bit nervous at first, thinking he might have done something wrong, Evelyn calmed him down, assuring him that was not the case. His nerves then shifted from fear to excitement and eagerness, as he felt that being called to court in his second year as a witcher was an honor, akin to the Griffins of yesteryear.

Putnam took the opportunity to spend some of the money he had obtained during their time on the islands. He purchased new clothes and upgraded his equipment, including a Bear School Armor, to be more precise. Although he didn't particularly like it, he felt the armor heavy, and annoying. He didn't know how the Bear Witchers could fight with it, plus it reminded him of his unpleasant encounter with Cervin the previous year. The armor was a relic of a time when more witches from the Bear School passed through the islands and it was the most "witcher" thing he could find.

Before visiting the queen, and after Putnam has tried on the armor Evelyn affectionately teased him by calling him "Owl Bear" after a extinct crossbreed that had been released by mages in Skellige during the 10th century to wipe out an invading species.

As the witcher traveled to Kaer Trolde, he couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. He knew that being summoned to the queen's court meant that he would have to be on his best behavior and represent the ideals of the witcher's code. He spent the journey rehearsing his mannerisms and reviewing the protocols of court etiquette, ensuring that he would make a good impression while Evelyn laughed at the witcher's nerves and tried to get him to relax, saying she was sure he would do fine.

When he arrived at Kaer Trolde, he was greeted by the queen's courtiers and led to the throne room. The grandeur of the room was overwhelming, made during the last reform that Cerys had commissioned, it still retained the characteristic cultural style of the islands, but had a clear influence of the style in other

kingdoms, as if Cerys feared that the other kingdoms would not see them as equals, with high ceilings, intricate tapestries, and polished marble floors. The witcher could feel the weight of the court's eyes on him as he made his way towards to Cerys. The witcher approached the queen, accompanied by Evelyn. He was only a few steps away from her when he bowed in respect. After that, Cerys began to speak and explain the issue with the Vildkaarls that had been causing her headaches for almost a year and a half.

The vildkaarls had remained inactive and hidden since 1272, but only three years later, they resurfaced as part of a new coup attempt led by the queen's last sorceress advisor and her witcher boyfriend (the latter was actually a scapegoat, although nobody knew that). The sorceress promised the vildkaarls privileges if they helped with the coup, but it ultimately failed. The sorceress managed to escape, while her witcher boyfriend was arrested and punished, being sold into slavery. That's why she found it hard to trust another witcher. At the time, she thought it would deter the warrior order from further attempts to seize power. But their attempts continued, killing people, and taking territories. The crown could do nothing, because of the clan system present on the islands. That is why, after much debate with Evelyn, they turned to him. Since 1272, everyone knew that the Vildkaarls were werebears, monsters, after all. And who better to kill monsters than a witcher?

The witcher listened carefully to Cerys' explanation and felt a sense of responsibility settling over him. He knew that the vildkaarls were a dangerous group, and their actions could cause a lot of harm to innocent people. He felt honored that the queen had chosen him to help solve the problem and pledged to do his best to bring an end to their activities.

Evelyn stood beside the witcher, her expression thoughtful as she listened to the queen. She knew that the vildkaarls were a problem that needed to be dealt with, but she also knew that it would be a difficult task. The witcher was skilled, as he demonstrated with the nixas, the Black Demon and the kraken but he was still young and inexperienced, and the vildkaarls were a formidable enemy, perhaps, much more than all the previous ones.

Cerys continued speaking, explaining that she had received information that the vildkaarls were planning another coup attempt, and that it was likely to happen soon. She needed the witcher to find out more about their plans, and to stop them before they could put them into action. She had fought a lot during her reign, due to being the first female ruler with power, something that many clans

did not like. And she was not willing to give it up without a fight.

The witcher nodded, his expression serious. He knew that the task would not be easy, but he was determined to succeed. He asked the queen for more information about the vildkaarls, their leaders, and their activities. Cerys provided him with what she knew, and also promised to provide him with any additional resources he needed to complete his mission, apart from a considerable sum of money, which Putnam could not refuse. He had doubts at first as to whether it broke his neutrality, but when he learned of the warrior order's status as werebears, he felt that this was not the case.

With that, the meeting was adjourned, and the witcher, accompanied by Evelyn, left the throne room. Afterward, Putnam decided to discuss it at length with Evelyn. He had agreed to it out of duty and for the money offered, but he sensed the danger involved. Despite having her by his side, and her skills as a sorceress, it was clear to him that, as with the kraken, they would need help. He could handle one werebear, at most two, at a time. And with her by his side, they could take down maybe eight, being optimistic, but no more. It was clear that they needed, help. Evelyn then suggested that they should visit the various clans and try to gather allies as well new information that could complement the one they already had.

And that's what the witcher and the sorceress did the next day. They traveled all over the island, looking for allies. Unfortunately, tensions with the Clan Drummond were still present, so they refused to offer their help. However, they did obtain important information. None of their own had felt "the call of the bear" and disappeared. That made them remove the Clan from the list of suspects. Although they did not like Cerys as queen, they respected that she was in power. Moreover, they visited the ambassadors of the other clans present in Ard Skellig. The response was the same, of rejection. Although this time, not because of tensions but out of fear, that taking sides against the Vildkaarls would generate conflicts with other clans, leading to a civil war.

Somewhat desperate about the situation and not knowing what to do, they turned to the Skjoldungs, thinking that the order of mercenaries and warriors could be allies, even if they had to pay them a large sum of money. And to their luck, they found not only allies but answers as well, because the Skjoldungs, who two of Cerys's half-brothers, Ragnar and Loki, had joined, revealed to them that both had disappeared one day in search of becoming "stronger" and never reappeared. This quickly led them to speculate What if the coup d'état planned

by the vilkdaarls was led by both lost stepbrothers? Shortly thereafter, they would discover that they were right.

Ragnar and Loki had been seduced by promises of power and wealth by the vilkdaarls, who had convinced them that the current government was weak and needed to be replaced. That they were the rightful heirs, not only to his clan, but to the throne, and not Cerys, nor his other half-brother. And that a hereditary diarchy would be the best for the future of the archipelago. They were quickly accepted and converted, as the years went by, they ended up taking control of the warrior order, which was in need of strong leaders after the death of Artis in 1273 from old age.

After discovering this, Putnam and Evelyn hired the Skjoldungs by paying them a partial amount upfront and promising them the rest would be given by Cerys. They, along with their new allies, then set course for the Highlands to search for the lair of the warrior order. They even visited the village of Fornhala, where they had once lived, but found it deserted. The only thing they found was a possible clue, although somewhat illegible, indicating that the warrior order might have settled in Kaer Gelen, since the ruins of the fortress were finally free of monsters after the legendary Geralt of Rivia went there.

As they continued their journey, the group encountered many obstacles and challenges, including harsh weather conditions and dangerous creatures that roamed the mountains. However, they persevered and pressed on, determined to uncover the truth behind the mysterious disappearance of Cerys's half-brothers.

Finally, after several days of traveling through the rugged terrain, they stumbled upon Kaer Gelen. Once a great fortress, now lay in ruins. The walls were crumbling, and the once-mighty towers had been reduced to rubble. The place was eerily quiet, and the only sounds were the howling winds that swept through the ruins. It was clear that the fortress had been abandoned for many years.

As they approached the ruins, they noticed that the gates were ajar. It was a sign that someone had been there recently. The group carefully entered the fortress, wary of any danger that may be lurking in the shadows. The Skjoldungs led the way, in alert for any signs of their enemies.

Inside the fortress, they found evidence of recent activity. The place was littered with discarded weapons, and there were signs that fires had been lit recently. It

was clear that the warrior order had been using the ruins as a hideout.

As they searched the fortress, they eventually came across a hidden chamber deep within the ruins. Inside, they found evidence of a coup being planned. Maps and diagrams were strewn about the room, and it was clear that the vilkdaarls had been planning an attack on Kaer Trolde. Putnam, Evelyn, and the Skjoldungs carefully examined the maps and diagrams, trying to decipher the details of the vilkdaarls' plan. It was evident that they had been meticulously planning this attack for months, if not years. The group was shocked to see that the attack was set to take place within the next few days, when the reports that Cerys had received said that, at most, the coup d'état could take place within two months, giving them very little time to act.

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Putnam and Evelyn quickly came up with a plan to thwart the coup. They decided to gather as much information as possible about the vilkdaarls' plans and take it to Cerys, who could then use it to mobilize his forces and protect the capital.

The Skjoldungs, who had been itching for a fight, were more than willing to help in any way they could. They decided to stay behind and keep an eye on the fortress, making sure that the vilkdaarls did not return and catch them off guard.

Putnam and Evelyn, immediately set out for the capital, determined to warn Cerys of the impending attack. The journey was long and perilous, but they managed to reach Kaer Trolde in time. As soon as they arrived in the capital, Putnam and Evelyn made their way to the royal palace to meet with Cerys. Cerys was surprised to see them, as she had not expected any news so soon. However, when she heard of the vilkdaarls' plans, he immediately called for her advisors and military commanders to convene an emergency council.

Putnam and Evelyn were invited to the council as well, where they presented the evidence they had gathered from Kaer Gelen. The maps and diagrams they had found were examined in detail, and it was clear that the vilkdaarls were planning a massive assault on the capital. Cerys, along with her advisors and commanders, quickly formulated a plan to defend the capital. She ordered her troops to be mobilized, the construction of barricades and fortifications around the city, and alerted her people to prepare for a siege.

The Skjoldungs returned to the capital, after seeing that the Vildkaarls did not return to Kaer Gelen and joined the forces of Queen Cerys and her men, and the days that followed, the vilkdaarls launched their attack on the capital. Their

forces were vast, and they came from all directions, trying to overwhelm the city's defenders. However, Cerys and her troops were well-prepared, and they fought bravely, repelling the enemy at every turn.

Cerys still did not understand the motives of her half-brothers, when the clan was the important thing. But in the end, she did not care, she was willing to do anything to prevent the governance of Skellige from falling into the wrong hands or worse a that the islands would had to face a civil war because of Loki and Ragnar's selfishness.

Putnam and Evelyn, who had joined the battle alongside the Skjoldungs, fought valiantly as well. As the battle raged on, Putnam and Evelyn used their respective abilities to devastating effect. Putnam, was well-equipped to handle the Vildkaarls' werebear transformations, his silver sword slicing through their hides with ease. Evelyn, on the other hand, unleashed a powerful storm to decimate the enemy's ranks.

Despite the odds stacked against them, Cerys and her forces held the line, fighting with a ferocity born of desperation. They refused to let their homeland fall into the hands of the Vildkaarls, and their determination spurred them on even as their enemies threw wave after wave of warriors at them. As the battle wore on, it became clear that the Vildkaarls were losing ground. Their numbers had dwindled, and their morale had been shattered by the relentless assault of Cerys and her troops. Finally, after hours of bloody combat, the last of the Vildkaarls were defeated, and the battle was won.

Cerys emerged victorious, her reputation as a skilled warrior and queen cemented in the annals of Skellige and the Northen Kingdoms history. She was even compared with Calanthe and Meve after that. In the aftermath of the battle, Cerys set about the task of rebuilding Kaer Trolde. She worked tirelessly to restore the damage inflicted by the Vildkaarls, and she implemented measures to ensure that Skellige would never again be threatened by such an enemy. Making any warrior order existing or will be in the future created, being dependent on the state, rather than the clans.

Putnam and Evelyn, for their part, had earned the respect and admiration of the Skjoldungs, who saw in them great warriors. And after the battle, they helped rebuild the capital. Putnam, for his part, received the promised money, as did the Skjoldungs. However, both the witcher and the mercenary group / warrior order decided to give a large part it so that the reconstruction would proceed

faster.

As for Loki and Ragnar, their whereabouts remained unknown. Some speculated that they had been killed in the battle, by both the witcher and the mage, while others believed that they had fled Skellige, afraid to face the wrath of Cerys. In the end, it didn't matter. Skellige had weathered the storm, and its people had emerged stronger for it. And Cerys, who had once been uncertain of her place as queen of the islands, had found her calling as a leader and defender of the Skelliger people.

Breakup with Evelyn and adventures in Western Melukka

After putting an end to the warrior order, the days passed normally, except for the reconstruction that was required to repair the damage caused to Kaer Trolde during the battle. It seemed that, after a long time, a new era of peace and prosperity had arrived for Skellige. However, not everyone was happy. Putnam, for example, since the battle, had remained quiet, reflective, and solitary, had realized several things after that experience, being the most important, that he missed Tubiel more than ever. This made him conflicted, given his feelings for Evelyn, and resulted in him being lost in thought more often than he wanted to be.

The witcher remained in that state for a week, not knowing what decision to make. Then one day, a Melukkan Merchant Ship arrived at the port of Kaer Trolde. It was making a stop before continuing on its way to its homeland. During those days, Putnam often walked along the harbor to reflect, and the ship caught his attention. He was struck by its unique details and shapes; it was unlike any ship he had ever seen before. As the merchants disembarked, a mix of Melukkans and some Nordlings hired as employees, he couldn't help but overhear their conversations. They spoke of a red-haired witcheress who had defended them from a gang in Novigrad before heading south. This reminded him of Tubiel (though they were actually talking about Jolanta, he didn't know at the time). His heart stirred, and he approached the merchants, asking if he could join them on their journey back to their homeland.

The merchants and their employees saw no reason why he could not join them. They were still grateful to Jolanta and thought that having a witcher on board would be useful for any potential threats, be it a gang or a monster. They offered him a more than decent salary, and Putnam accepted without a second thought. However, he soon realized that he would have to break up with Evelyn. For a

moment, he considered the idea of building something deeper with her, as she had been good to him. But his work as a witcher, his rekindled feelings for Tubiel, and the opportunity to see her again made him discard that idea. In the end, he decided to join the merchants.

After much thought, Putnam knew what he had to do. Late one night, after one of their passionate nights and night walks, while Evelyn was asleep, Putnam carefully packed his belongings into a bag. He took out a piece of parchment and a quill and began to write a letter. In the letter, he expressed his gratitude for everything that Evelyn had done for him and explained that he had to leave. He left the letter on the bedside table and placed a bag of coins beside it, just as Tubiel had done for him, and just as he would do with so many others woman whose hearts would break.

As he was about to leave, he looked back at Evelyn sleeping soundly in bed. He hesitated, thinking about how she had treated him with kindness and care. But in the end, he knew he couldn't stay. Quietly, he left the room and made his way down to the harbor. The Melukkan Merchant Ship was already waiting for him. He boarded the ship, feeling a mix of excitement and guilt. He knew he had to break Evelyn's heart, but he couldn't ignore the chance to see Tubiel once again.

In reality, Tubiel had not marched that far south, but the events in Melukka would be crucial for the future. They forged the witcher's spirit for exploration and, more importantly, that of his best friend, Fabio Sachs.

Arrival at Warahše and miscellaneous contracts (August 1276)

“The Prouti Strait is a treacherous passage that separates Barsa and Hannu, connecting the two halves of the Sea of the Hourglass during high tide. It is known for its strong currents and unpredictable weather, making it a challenging route for sailors to navigate.”

—Fabio Sachs, Unpublished notes of the 1282 Expedition (Vol.1)

After two long months of travel, the witcher finally arrived in Melukka, mistakenly believing that he would see Tubiel again. This was not the case, but as previously mentioned, his time in this distant land would not be wasted, and he would end up forging the future grandmaster of the School of the Crane, as it did in Skellige. In fact, it is believed that the prototype of the method used by the witches of this school to kill a sea monster the long rope tied to the ends of a ship's mast and the tight fitting protective suit covering the whole body except the hands, feet, and head was created during the journey between Skellige and Melukka.

When Putnam was forced to face a ningen shortly after crossing the Prouti Strait, separating [Barsa](#) and [Hannu](#), in the Sea of the Hourglass for several hours at night in order to avoid hypothermia since the potion of [Twymder](#) didn't work for cold water areas due to the more than obvious excessive humidity. The rope, on the other hand, as the story goes, it is said that was suggested by the ship's sailors at the last minute, in order to prevent the witcher from being carried away by the cold water currents that cause the monsoon phenomenon in the tropical areas of the world.

A quasi-myth also mentions that the expedition to the [Far East](#), with the visit to Hannu and Barsa included, was due not only to his passage through Melukka, but also because Putnam was so fascinated with both lands, after seeing them in the strait, that he convinced Fabio it was necessary to find out the secrets that both territories concealed. It is said that he even saw the magnificent pyramids of Hannu from the ship when they passed by.

Once Putnam arrived in the capital of the coastal kingdom of Warahše, Saintala, it took him a few days to get used to the area because of the culture shock, before finding out about Tubiel. Although the Common Language was present in Melukka, especially in Western Melukka, it was not enough for the witcher to manage on his own. Therefore, he had to take advantage of those days to look for a translator and guide. He met Indira, a young merchant and daya (equivalent to a witch in the Northern Kingdoms, i.e., a rogue magic user or unregistered mage), who would later become a tavern keeper. Putnam hired her to help him get around the territory due to her knowledge of languages.

During his stay, Putnam learned that the kingdom was facing a multitude of monster problems since the disappearance of the [School of the Spider](#). So he took on several contracts to kill a variety of monsters that were threatening the safety of the local people. Putnam saw this as an opportunity to adapt and improve his skills in monster hunting. He thought that perhaps his place might be there, where monsters were more plentiful than in the North, despite having seen a slight resurgence in recent years due to the lack of witches, allowing him to make a decent living. In reality, these thoughts hid his desire to explore and see the world, which, as previously mentioned, would emerge during this stage of his life gradually. None of these contracts, however, could have been completed without Indira's help and her knowledge in languages and the local monsters.

There were monsters like the hahu, a reptilian distant relative of the wyverns, that lurked in the rivers, waiting for their prey to get too close. The gajasura, a monstrous elephant-like creature that rampaged through villages and towns, causing destruction wherever it went. Or the tekhumiavis, a type of weretigers that terrorized the coastal dry tropical forests of the kingdom in the full moon nights, preying on unwary travelers. This last experience was very valuable for him in defending himself against the attacks of "*The Incurable Curse*" the following year since both types of therianthropes behaved similarly.

One of their first contracts was to track down a hahu that had been terrorizing a small village. Putnam and Indira spent several days searching for the creature along the riverbanks. They finally found it hiding in a murky pond, waiting for its next meal. Putnam used his crossbow to deliver the killing blow, and they collected the bounty on the monster's head.

Another contract involved hunting down a gajasura that had been rampaging through a nearby town, causing widespread destruction. Putnam and Indira tracked the creature through the countryside, using their knowledge of the land to stay ahead of it. When they finally caught up to it, Putnam used his silver sword to take down the beast, ending its reign of terror.

Finally, Putnam and Indira were hired to track down a tekhumiavi that had been terrorizing a nearby forest. The monster as many therianthropes, like their distant relative, the werecats, was known for its stealth and speed, making it a difficult target. But with Indira's guidance, Putnam was able to set a trap using bait and snares. When the tekhumiavi stepped into the trap, Putnam was able to strike it with his silver sword, killing it and earning the gratitude of the local bibi who as a reward gave him an armor of the School of the Spider, which he would carry throughout his time in the region, the quasi-mythical school of witchers that had disappeared long ago and Indira had talked about a lot telling the now legends about their exploits.

And after those two weeks of adaptation that the witcher needed to get used to life in Melukka and to complete those contracts passed, both he and Indira set off towards their next goal, the neighboring kingdom of Telmun.

Investigating the wrong clue about Tubiel and time at Telmun

After those two weeks, the witcher and his guide marched to the neighboring kingdom of Telmun. Telmun was also coastal, located a little further north of Warahše, and had a slightly warmer climate due to its closer proximity to the

Korath Desert. However, the coastal winds alleviated some of the heat. The witcher began to investigate the trail of his beloved Tubiel but, mistaken as he was, he found nothing except some unsubstantiated rumors in the Nilfgaardian embassy in the country. After checking them, he was left with nothing. He was frustrated, but due to his good experience at the beginning in the region, he decided to stay longer and explore more with Indira, hoping to make the most out of his time there.

With Indira's help, he continued to take on contracts to hunt down dangerous monsters that threatened the safety of the locals, especially marine and aerial creatures.

Putnam's battles with these monsters foreshadowed his future destiny as the founder of the School of the Crane, which would take place 104 years later. One of his most notable battles was against tiamat, a relative of the sea serpent of the [Great Sea](#) and the [leviathan](#). Although less powerful than these two, tiamat was still a formidable monster that some local sects worshipped as a goddess.

Putnam also took on contracts to hunt other creatures such as the imdugud, a distant relative of the [griffin](#), as well as the [archgriffin](#) and the hippogriffin, with the imdugud being closer in nature to the latter. He also hunted the pazuzu, a supposed demon which turned out to be a monster related to the [harpies](#). It is also said that during this time, he unintentionally developed a Sign that does the opposite of Aard. However, he was unable to replicate it properly, and he did not use it again until years later during the early years of the School of the Crane when he rediscovered it.

As they traveled throughout the kingdom, Putnam became increasingly interested in the local culture and traditions. He spent his free time learning about the history of the region and exploring its beautiful landscapes. He discovered that Telmun was known for its bustling port cities, which were the main hub for trade in the region. The cultural capital, the city of Ashtara, was particularly famous for its beautiful architecture and vibrant markets. It was in this city that everything would change for Putnam, as Indira was visiting relatives, and him was still taking on contracts, something important happened. He was able to defend himself quite well in the Melukkan Common Language thanks to Indira's teachings and his interactions with the locals. Although he didn't speak like a native or someone with years of learning the language, he could make himself understood.

Thanks to this time, in addition to his exploration experiences, Putnam would be also crucial contributor to the Tome of Monsters, which would included first and second-hand information on monsters beyond the Northern Kingdoms provided by him. This would be one of the few works that he would be credited as an author, as most of his other works would be published indirectly and credited to him, after his death.

One of the most notable works in his name was the compilation of all his diaries, created by Adalwulf of Aedirn after Putnam's death in 1555, entitled "*Life and Works of Putnam Pitch*." This work contained a prologue by Adalwulf and comments by both Adalwulf and Stefan "The Crane". The compilation of his diaries was another factor that contributed to his sanctification, and it became the sacred book of the followers of the cult of Saint Putnam.

"Between Two Lands" (late August - early September 1276)

"There's something about you, Mr. Putnam. Something that sets you apart from the others witchers. I can sense a certain strength and determination in you, a desire to make a difference in the world. That's a rare quality these days."

—Herna to Putnam during their conversation in the sorceress' palace.

One day, while Indira was still visiting her relatives and Putnam was returning from a contract to kill a plague of pretas. These were basically a type of local ghoul capable of exhaling acetylene in the form of steam, causing it to "spit" fire. During his return to the Inn in Ashtara where he was staying, was approached by a page of the queen of Telmun, Roxana. Putnam had gained fame not only for his contracts, but also for his striking bicolor eyes, which were a rarity in the country. Added to the fact of being a foreigner and a witcher, it was only a matter of time before something like this happened.

Putnam was invited to a private audience with the queen herself. At first, he was unsure of what the queen could possibly want with him, but he agreed nonetheless. Luckily for Putnam, the queen was fluent in multiple languages, including the Common Language, so they were able to understand each other without any problems and without intermediaries. Once in the palace, the queen explained her problem to him. Which was a foreign sorceress, a distant relative of hers, named Herna of Gemmeria.

The queen explained that Herna had arrived in the kingdom with a group of merchants, ostensibly to seek trade opportunities. However, it soon became

clear that Herna had ulterior motives. She had been gathering support from the local nobility, and the queen suspected that Herna was planning a coup to overthrow her and seize the throne for herself. The truth was that Herna had fled from Skellige after a failed coup attempt, and she intended to take control of at least one of the kingdoms in the Melukka region in order to give magic "its rightful place in the world" and exact revenge on the islanders. She had spent the previous year winning over before her arriving in Telmun the merchants of the neighboring kingdoms who were often on their way there and had weight in the country's economy, later on the local nobility to her cause. Furthermore, there were rumors that she was creating monstrosities in her laboratory and unleashing them into the world to terrorize the common people of Telmun and turn them against Roxana.

Putnam was hesitant at first, as he had never been one for politics and preferred to focus on his contracts and his own survival. However, the rumors about Herna creating monsters in her lab and releasing them into the world to terrorize the common people of Telmun and turn them against Roxana was enough to motivate him to get involved in the problem, just as it had happened in Skellige with the Vildkaarls. He believed that by doing so, he would not be violating his neutrality.

The queen arranged for Putnam to meet with Herna under the guise of a potential ally and the two met at the sorceress's residence, an old palace from a previous dynasty that had been abandoned. With the money she had obtained in Skellige, and some objects from the islands that she had acquired and were considered exotic in Melukka, the sorceress had managed to renovate the palace. Putnam had to admit that Herna was a striking woman. Her physical appearance was a mix of her Nordling and Melukkan origins, which made her stand out everywhere. Her short blonde hair framed her face perfectly, accentuating her bright blue eyes and tanned skin. She was dressed in the traditional sari of the region, with delicate jewelry adorning her face and hair, enhancing her beauty.

When she spoke, her voice was soft and almost childlike, yet there was a sharp wit behind her words that could cut through even the thickest of plots. Her exotic mannerisms and way of speaking had a seductive power over those around her, and it was clear that she was skilled at manipulating people to do her bidding.

Putnam couldn't deny that Herna had a certain charm and charisma. Despite his initial suspicions, he found himself drawn in by her alluring voice and captivating

presence. At first, he thought it was because of a spell, recalling what the Black Book of Ellander said about the first meeting between Yennefer and Geralt but that was not the case.

As the meeting with Herna continued, Putnam found himself increasingly drawn to her. Herna spoke of all kinds of inventions and advancements that could be made with the use of magic, from improving crop yields to creating new medicines for treating diseases. She spoke of a world where magic was not just reserved for the wealthy and powerful, but accessible to all, where the common people could benefit from the wonders that magic could bring, and he found himself agreeing with many of her points. However, in reality, this was all a lie. It was clear that she was intelligent and well-educated, and her insights into the workings of politics and power were impressive.

Despite his growing fascination with Herna, Putnam knew that he couldn't let his guard down. He was there to gather information and assess the threat that she posed to Roxana's rule. As the conversation continued, he began to subtly steer the discussion towards her plans for the future. Herna spoke vaguely of alliances with other kingdoms and of creating a new order that would put sorcerers at the forefront of society. She seemed to be playing her cards close to her chest, however, and Putnam couldn't get a clear idea of her ultimate goals.

As the meeting drew to a close, Herna invited Putnam to stay for dinner. He hesitated at first, unsure if it was wise to spend any more time with her than necessary, but ultimately he agreed. Over the course of the meal, they continued their discussion, with Herna revealing more about her personal history and her beliefs about the nature of magic.

Putnam was surprised to find that he was enjoying himself. Despite his reservations about Herna's intentions, he couldn't deny that there was something captivating about her. As the evening wore on and the wine flowed freely, the conversation became more relaxed and intimate. Herna's seductive charm was in full force, and Putnam found himself getting lost in her hypnotic gaze.

It wasn't until the end of the night, when Putnam was preparing to leave, that Herna made her move. As he stood in the doorway, she stepped closer to him, her eyes fixed on his. Without a word, she pressed her lips to his, and Putnam found himself responding with a fervor that he hadn't known he was capable of.

In that moment, all of his doubts and

suspicions melted away. He was consumed by the passion of the kiss and the desire that had been building inside him all night. It was only when they finally broke apart that he realized what had just happened. As he stumbled out of the palace the next morning and made his way back to the Royal Palace, Putnam knew that he was in deep trouble. He had just betrayed his client and compromised his own neutrality, all for the sake of a beautiful sorceress who had seduced him with her words and her touch. He had no idea how he was going to navigate the treacherous waters ahead, but one thing was certain - he had to see Herna again.

As Putnam returned, he start to ponder on how to solve the problem and avoid falling into Herna's web again. He was also thinking about what to tell Roxana. Once he arrived at the palace, he met with Roxana and informed her about everything that had happened during the meeting and dinner, except for the part about the passionate night between them.

Putnam tried to keep his mind focused on the task at hand, but he couldn't shake the memory of Herna's intoxicating aura. He knew that he needed to be careful not to let his impulses get the best of him again, especially when it came to sorceress. He also knew that he couldn't keep the truth from Roxana forever, but he needed some time to figure out how to tell her without jeopardizing his position as a spy.

As he recounted the events of the previous night, he left out the details of their passionate encounter, but he could see the suspicion in Roxana's eyes. He had always prided himself on his honesty and integrity, but he knew that he had let her down by allowing himself to be swayed by Herna's charms.

Roxana listened intently to his story and asked probing questions, trying to uncover any hidden truths. Putnam did his best to answer honestly without revealing too much, but he knew that he would have to come clean eventually.

As their meeting came to a close, Roxana thanked him for his hard work and dedication, and Putnam knew that he had to redouble his efforts to prove his loyalty. He couldn't afford to let Herna's seductive nature cloud his judgment, especially when the fate of a kingdom was at stake.

The days that followed passed relatively normally, if one could call it that. Putnam found himself shuttling between both palaces, keeping Roxana abreast of the situation and reporting any progress that had been made. Although progress was slow, he was gradually gaining more information about the coup

and the plans of the sorceress, or so he believed, because in the nature of the sorceress, it was telling ten lies for each truth. And as he continued to work closely with Roxana, their professional relationship, turned into friendship and eventually deepened into something more. They would often find themselves lost in each other's company, discussing everything from politics to personal dreams and aspirations. They began to rely on each other for emotional support, and Putnam found himself seeking out Roxana's counsel on matters that went beyond their official duties.

One day, while they were discussing the latest updates of the situation, Roxana reached out to touch Putnam's hand, and he felt a sudden jolt of electricity. It was as if a spark had been ignited between them, and from that moment on, they both knew that they were more than just friends.

Despite his lingering attraction to Herna, Putnam found himself drawn more and more to Roxana. They would steal moments together whenever they could, sharing stolen kisses and secret embraces. Putnam found himself falling deeper and deeper in love with Roxana, and he knew that he had to find a way to extricate himself from Herna's web before it was too late.

However, it was easier said than done. Herna was a master manipulator, and every time Putnam thought he had a handle on her, she would throw a new curveball his way. He found himself getting lost in her hypnotic gaze, forgetting all about his loyalty to Roxana and the kingdom of Telmun telling her about Roxana's plans to stop her, thus becoming a double agent.

But even so, he was determined to go all the way, no matter if it cost him his own life. Lost and not knowing what to do, other than to walk between those two women - one whom he had come to love and the other who was capable of seducing him with just a few words - he decided, as a last resort, to interrupt Indira's family visit and consult her. After all, she had not only become a guide through the region, but also a friend.

So, as he walked towards to the home of the relatives Indira was visiting, he couldn't help but feel a sense of relief wash over him. He knew that Indira would be able to help him navigate this treacherous situation or he hoped so. Indira, who had previously served as a daya advisor in various kingdoms, city-states, and empires of the region (equivalent to a druid advisor in the Northern Kingdoms), such as the city-state of Kirata in Central Melukka, the kingdom of Baira in North Melukka, or the empire of Parth in Eastern Melukka, knew a lot about politics and

similar situations.

When he finally arrived at the house, he was greeted warmly by Indira's relatives, who welcomed him with open arms. They had heard so much about him from Indira and were eager to meet him in person. Putnam was struck by their warmth and hospitality, and he felt grateful to have people who appreciated him in this strange and foreign land.

After some small talk and pleasantries, Putnam finally broached the topic that had been weighing on his mind, sharing his concerns about Herna with Indira, listening carefully and thoughtfully. Knowing the delicate nature of the situation, Indira realized that Putnam had a tough decision to make: either give in to Herna's seduction and risk losing himself or resist her charms and risk losing her and also putting the kingdom in more danger.

Determined to help Putnam, Indira thought carefully and came up with a plan. Her grandfather used to be a marriage counselor, and part of his business was making a potent brew that acted as a truth serum during certain ceremonies for complicated marriages. If they gave some of the concoction to Herna, she might reveal her true intentions.

Although it was a risky plan, Putnam agreed to try it. Indira promised to talk to her relatives and prepare the concoction. She encouraged Putnam to remain strong and focused, and assured him that she would help him more if needed. With a renewed sense of hope, Putnam felt grateful to have a wise and resourceful friend like Indira, and quickly, seeing that all that Indira had told them was true, included seeing the good attitude of the witcher and how well he had behaved with Indira in front of them, her relatives accepted him and began to prepare the concoction.

As they waited for the brew to be prepared, Indira began to work out a plan with Putnam, when the brew was finally ready, Putnam put it in one of his empty potion bottles and said goodbye to Indira and her relatives. He started making his way towards Herna's palace, feeling both nervous and apprehensive about what was to come. To calm himself down, he decided to first return to Roxana's palace to inform her that he had made a breakthrough in the Herna situation. He couldn't reveal the details about the concoction, but he wanted to let Roxana know that he was taking a risk and that he didn't know if he would return.

Upon arriving at Roxana's palace, Putnam was greeted warmly by her guards, the only people that Roxana trusted that days, who had grown fond of him during his

stay. Roxana, who was in the courtyard, was pleased to see him and asked about his progress with Herna. Putnam, trying to hide his nerves, told her that he had a plan, but it was risky. Roxana's face turned serious as she cautioned him that he should be careful.

She then revealed to him that he was not the first person to be hired to deal with Herna. Many others had disappeared after being sent to her before him, and she had not told him before, so as not to scare him off and make him reject the offer. Putnam's heart sank as he realized the danger he was in. However, Roxana reassured him that he had already achieved more than anyone else and that he should be proud of himself. Feeling grateful for Roxana's support and encouragement, Putnam left her palace once again and continued on his way to the sorceress's home.

Once Putnam arrived at Herna 's palace again with the concoction ready, he was greeted by Herna with one of her seductive smiles which made him momentarily forget his purpose. The sorceress, clad in a silk robe that clung to her curves, beckoned him closer, Putnam feigning as best he could, approached her with an impish smile.

Herna ordered Putnam to one her chambers, where she offered him a drink from a crystal goblet. Putnam accepted, knowing that this was his chance to drugged the sorceress. He took a sip of the wine, noting its rich flavor, and began to engage Herna in conversation, playing along with her seductive banter, As they talked, Herna became more and more relaxed, her guard dropping with each passing moment, and in a moment when Herna wasn 't looking, Putnam seized the opportunity and deftly poured a small amount of the brew that acted as a truth serum into her wineglass, stirring it gently with his finger. He watched as the brew dissolved, turning the wine a slightly darker shade of red.

Herna, apparently unaware of the deception, drank from the glass, savoring the flavor of the wine. Putnam felt a sense of relief wash over him as he watched the brew take effect, causing Herna's eyes to widen slightly as she realized what had happened.

He waited for the sorceress to speak, watching as her expression changed from one of surprise to one of anger. Herna accused Putnam of trickery and demanded to know what he had done to her. But Putnam remained calm and collected, knowing that he had to get the information he needed from her.

Putnam then smiled satisfactorily and began to ask questions, finally knowing

what was true and what was a lie, drawing the information out of the woman. Herna revealed that the vast majority of the rumors were true. And that even all those who had been sent before Putnam had been turned into monstrosities after she had seduced them, by way of punishment, converted into bear crossbreeds with other creatures, and yes, some had been released on the outskirts of the city to scare and also check their effectiveness as weapons.

But unknown to Putnam, all of Herna "surprise" and "anger" after been drugged was a hoax. Herna had read his mind and knew of his plans to give her the concoction. As soon as she saw him arrive at her home. As she apparently went for the wine and Putnam to the chamber, she took the opportunity to activate her megascope, alerting her allies, giving them orders to initiate the siege of Ashtara and release the ursine monstrosities. She let herself be drugged by the concoction because of the simple pleasure of revealing everything to the naive witcher without any concealment.

With a smirk, Herna revealed that she had known all along about Putnam's plan and had used it to her advantage. Putnam's face turned pale with shock and fear as he realized that he had been played by the cunning sorceress.

Before he could react, Herna summoned her golem assistant and ordered it to arrest Putnam. He fought back and managed to escape, using different Signs to keep the golem at bay, such as Aard. He knew he didn't have time to fight with the construct, as he was already too worried, not only about Roxana and how he had failed her and Telmun, but also about Indira and her relatives. That stupidity, because of his innocence and naivety of being a double agent, had cost him dearly. He had to find them both and get them to safety.

Escape from Telmun, pass through Makkan and return to the North

As he escaped from the palace, the city was in chaos and destruction. Buildings were burning, and the air was thick with smoke. The nobles who were Herna's allies, along with what were probably hired mercenaries, had initiated the attack from inside. The screams of people and the crackling of flames were all around him, but he had no time to stop and help. Asthara was lost, and so was Telmun. He could only hope that this would leave as few victims as possible. He had to keep moving to avoid being captured by Herna's golem. He had to find Roxana, and more importantly, Indira and her relatives.

The golem, a massive stone construct more than six feet tall, was tireless in its pursuit. It seemed to have an unrelenting desire to capture him and bring him

back to Herna. He tried to shake it off by running through the winding alleys and narrow streets of the city, but it always managed to catch up with him.

As he turned another corner, he almost collided with a group of loyal Telmun soldiers who were fighting off a group of attackers. Without thinking, Putnam joined the fray, his steel sword flashing in the dim light. He managed to dispatch a few of the attackers, but there were too many of them. He had to retreat before he got overwhelmed.

As he continued to run, his thoughts turned to Roxana. His intuition told him she was still alive, but he had no idea where she was. He wondered if she was safe, or if she was still in danger. He hoped that she had managed to escape the city before the attack began.

Despite his exhaustion, Putnam refused to give up. He couldn't let Herna capture him and take him back to the palace. He had to keep moving. As he ran, he spotted a narrow alleyway, and he quickly turned into it, hoping to lose the golem.

To his surprise, he found himself in a small courtyard, surrounded by high walls. He could hear the golem's heavy footsteps approaching. There was no way out. He was trapped. He quickly searched for elemental oil, but he only had one vial since these creatures were rare and he did not possess many for fighting them. Following Keldar's teachings, he remembered the Thunderbolt potion, which would increase his strength. Despite his inexperience, he thought that perhaps he would have a chance against the golem. If he could take the golem out of combat, he could focus more calmly, so to speak, on finding Roxana and Indira. However, the problem was that the golem had cornered him, and he needed a moment of calm to correctly pour the oil into the silver sword and drink the potion.

With the golem rapidly approaching, the witcher knew he had to act quickly. He quickly uncorked the vial of elemental oil and applied it to his silver sword, hoping that the potent mixture would give him an edge in the upcoming battle. As he finished, he reached into his belt and retrieved the small flask of Thunderbolt potion.

With trembling hands, the witcher uncorked the flask and downed the contents in one gulp. Almost immediately, he felt a surge of energy coursing through his body, his muscles bulging with newfound strength, allowing him to take down the golem with fewer strikes.

The golem, now only a few feet away, raised its massive fists, ready to deliver a crushing blow. The witcher rolled to the side, narrowly avoiding the attack, and quickly regained his footing. He saw an opening and lunged forward, his sword glinting in the dim light of the courtyard.

The blade struck the golem's stony hide with a resounding clang, but it barely scratched the surface. The witcher gritted his teeth and struck again, this time with more force. The golem roared in fury and swung its fist, but the witcher dodged and delivered a swift kick to its knee joint. The golem stumbled, its balance disrupted, and the witcher took advantage of the opportunity. With a fierce cry, he lunged forward and plunged his sword into the golem's chest. The elemental let out a final roar before collapsing to the ground, its body crumbling into a pile of rubble.

Breathless and exhilarated, the witcher sheathed his sword and took a moment to catch his breath. He had survived the encounter, but he knew he couldn't afford to rest for long. The side effects of the potion would begin to appear sooner rather than later, and Roxana and Indira were still missing. He needed to find them before it was too late.

The first thing he did was to go to his horse, named Odin, not because he didn't care about losing things, which he did, but because he wanted to check if the animal was still alive. If it was, the horse would be useful for rescuing Roxana and Indira if they were among the living. Odin was an old horse, but still in good shape, white as snow with light gray tones. Although blind in one eye, it was useful to Putnam, and he didn't mind. It was from one of the breeds bred in Kovir and a gift from his master Keldar before performing the so-called Trial of the Journey. Putnam named it after one of the many names of the god of Skelligers and Nazairians, Wotan.

He hurriedly ran through the streets, doing what he could to help anyone in need, whether it was pushing soldiers back with Aard or delivering swift blows with his steel sword to those who were about to harm innocent people. All the while, he kept searching for his horse. Putnam's heart was pounding as he made his way through the debris-laden streets, his eyes scanning the area for any sign of Odin. Suddenly, he heard a familiar nicker and turned to see his horse galloping towards him. Relief flooded through him as he patted Odin's neck, grateful to see that his beloved companion was unharmed. Together, they rode through the chaotic scene, dodging falling debris and avoiding groups of fighters.

After urging the animal to give its all, he galloped towards Roxana's palace, only to find it completely engulfed in flames and quickly realized that it was lost. Sorrow gripped the witcher's heart. Even though Roxana was no more than a passing romance, he had come to love her quite a bit. Her possible death had left him emotionally touched. But he had to get over it quickly because of the urgency of the moment. However, in reality, he knew he wouldn't be able to forget it easily. The events that had happened would become another grain of sand in the mountain of guilt that would come after the events of four years in the future. A mountain that was born, after the apparent metaforical knight's armor which he weared it, rusted away.

After failing to find Roxana and presuming her dead due to the fire in her palace, he turned his attention to Indira and her relatives, finding them near the city gates. As Putnam approached, he could see the chaos unfolding before him. The ursine monstrosities were viciously attacking Indira's family, and she was struggling to keep them at bay. With lightning-fast reflexes, Putnam leapt from his horse and drew his silver sword, charging towards the nearest beast.

But at one moment, Indira's father stumbled and fell. One of the ursine monstrosities lunged towards him, its claws poised to strike, and just as the creature was about to land its fatal blow, Putnam swooped in and delivered a devastating blow to its neck, severing its head from its body.

With the immediate threat neutralized, Indira and her family breathed a sigh of relief. Putnam smiled wearily, noting how the side effects of the potion were manifesting. There were no words, but they understood each other. Afterwards, Indira and her family commandeered an abandoned nearby merchant's carriage, and after calming the agitated horses, they escaped from the city, escorted by Putnam heading to the city-state of Makkan, as it was the closest and safest place.

Luckily for Putnam, Indira, and her relatives, Makkan had a thriving economy at that time, and the city was at its peak in every way. Furthermore, they owed a debt of gratitude to Roxana, who had previously helped them with troops and money during their war against another city-state, Susiana. Therefore, they were able to welcome the influx of survivors that came from the attack on Asthara, including Putnam, Indira and her relatives. Along the way, they encountered more survivors, who joined them and despite their large numbers, Putnam continued to escort them.

Upon arriving in Makkan, Indira and her family were met with open arms. They were given food, shelter, and medical attention for any injuries sustained during their escape. Putnam was also welcomed and given a place to stay, as a sign of gratitude for his help in escorting the survivors despite being a foreigner.

After settling in Makkan, Putnam soon discovered a merchant ship that was heading north, and decided to take it. However, before departing, he bid farewell to Indira and her family, and gifted them a large portion of the riches he had obtained in Skellige and Melukka, hoping to help them rebuild their lives. With that money, Indira and her family made the decision to move Northen Kingdoms, more specifically to kingdom of Cidaris and the city of the same name, where they established a tavern named "The Golden Duck"

Meanwhile, Herna's takeover of Asthara proved successful, and she eventually took control of the entire country. However, her rule was plagued with instability, and the ambitious nobles she had allied with staged yet another coup, forcing her to flee. Herna eventually made her way to Haakland, where she became the advisor to the Great Khan Zeus. Unfortunately, her influence ultimately led to the Haaki Invasion of 1350, which had devastating consequences for the Northen Kingdoms and some parts of the Nilfgaardian Empire. Fortunately for the history, Herna was killed by one of her past lovers, another witcher, but from the School of the Bear, named Cervin, when he kicked her into a ravine during the Battle of Mahakam.

Despite the tumultuous events that followed, Indira and her family were able to start anew in Cidaris, where their tavern quickly became a popular gathering spot for travelers and locals alike. With time, they became an integral part of the community, known for their hospitality and delicious food. As for Putnam, he continued with his work as a witcher.

"Suprises "(early December 1276)

"May the Melukkan elephants trample me if I'm wrong, but I sense tension between you two. Let's smooth things over with another round of ale, and this one's on the house."

—Tunak whispering to Putnam

After two long months of relatively uneventful ship travel, with the exception of the occasional monster, which only served to further strengthen Putnam's destiny as a future founder and grandmaster of the School of the Crane, the witcher arrived in the North, more specifically in Kovir and its winter capital, Lan

Exeter. However, despite his intention to return to Kaer Seren to rest and spend the winter in the reconstructed fortress after an intense second year in The Path, the year 1276 still had several surprises in store for the young bi-colored-eyed witcher.

Putnam, during his training and in the brief escapades he had to the city, always accompanied by one of his masters, especially thanks to his master Elcon, had become fond of a tavern in the city called The Iron Beard. The tavern was run by the dwarf Tunak Bhangra, whose life Elcon had saved. Indirectly, prior to his adventures in Melukka, Tunak had subtly influenced Putnam through the stories he told about his imaginary past and his invented origins in that region, which Putnam had always taken as nonsense, but it was entertaining nonsense.

Despite this, he held affection and respect for the dwarf, who had always treated him very well. So, he went there to eat and use it as a resting place while he did some shopping in the city and took what he bought back to the fortress.

As Putnam traversed the wintry canals of Lan Exeter in a hired gondola, he was struck by the city's enchanting ambiance. The snowy buildings and waterways created a beautiful sight. The Iron Beard, situated on one of the canals, welcomed Putnam with the scent of savory food and the sounds of jovial chatter.

Stepping into the warm and welcoming tavern, Putnam was greeted by Tunak, the dwarf who ran the place. Tunak's joy at seeing the witcher was palpable, and he welcomed him with a beaming smile. The interior of the tavern was lit by the warm glow of lanterns, and Putnam settled down at a table to enjoy a hot meal and some ale.

As he savored his food, Tunak entertained him with tales of his imaginary past in Melukka. Though Putnam knew they were mostly tall tales, he enjoyed them nonetheless. The Iron Beard was a cozy and welcoming spot that provided the witcher with a much-needed respite from the chilly outdoors.

After finishing his meal, Putnam bid farewell to Tunak and hopped back into his gondola to continue his errands through the city's waterways. Once out of the tavern, he made his way to the market district, As Putnam navigated through the waterways, he couldn't help but feel a sense of tranquility that he had not experienced in a long time, the warmth of the tavern and the charm of the city had made for a much-needed break from his travels. However, this newfound sense of calmness had made him let his guard down, and he inadvertently took a wrong turn through the Grand Canal, losing his way.

As he continued to row, Putnam soon found himself in front of the grand and imposing Palace of Ensenada. As Putnam admired the palace from his gondola, he was suddenly startled by a familiar voice calling out to him. Turning his head, he saw his best friend, Fabio Sachs, standing on the palace steps with a bag slung over his shoulder. Fabio had been kicked out of the palace, and he looked both relieved and distraught at the same time.

After a joyous reunion, Fabio explained the reason for his expulsion. He had been working on an idea to map the entire Continent to create better trade routes, but for that, he would need to make a few expeditions that would cost a lot of money. The idea had been dismissed by the Crown because of its uncertainty. Fabio refused to give up on his dream, however, and had been kicked out for insisting on it. Ironically, a few years later, the Koviri Crown, after seeing the success of the Far East Expedition, would finance one of his expeditions.

Putnam listened intently to his friend's plight with a friendly and approachable smile. He told him about his time in Melukka to motivate him to keep fighting for his idea. He assured him that if he couldn't find funding in the Northern Kingdoms, he would be able to find it in Ebbing or Nilgaard. After hearing Putnam's words, Fabio felt a renewed sense of determination and decided to accompany him on his errands. As they rowed through the canals, Putnam pointed out the unique features of the city, which made Fabio forget his recent setback. They visited various shops and stalls, and Fabio even bought a few souvenirs for his family.

As the day drew to a close, Putnam decided to cheer his friend up by taking him to The Iron Beard for a drink. They sat at the same table where Putnam had enjoyed his meal earlier that day, and Tunak welcomed them warmly. They spent the evening drinking ale and swapping stories about what they make that year. And went the night came and the tavern began to empty, the two friends sat back and enjoyed the comfortable silence. Putnam was glad to have been able to lift Fabio's spirits and spend some quality time with his friend. But this comfortable silence was interrupted by the second surprise that the witcher had at the end of 1276. Although Putnam had already noticed a strange smell in the air due to his heightened senses as a witcher, it wasn't until the door opened and he saw who it was that his expression changed, and the silence became uncomfortable.

As the door opened, Putnam's heart skipped a beat when he saw Tubiel with her 5,4 feet, freckles, facial scars, curly red hair and green eyes, standing in front of

him, the Griffin didn't believe it for a second, but it was truly her. At that moment, memories flooded back to him of their time together and the painful breakup that followed. She was wearing a coat over a Superior Feline Armor, a clear indication that she had been on a mission. Interestingly, the mission on which Tubiel had been was the same one that led her to break up with Putnam, leaving him with a letter and a bag of coins. Tubiel had discovered that the mage sect had an extensive network that reached even the most unsuspected corners, and she had proof of it. She had just had a meeting with the Koviri Crown shortly after Putnam met Fabio again and they spent time together, to warn them and gather their support to dismantle the sect. Like with Fabio, the kings ignored her. Dismissing her evidence, leaving her frustrated and only seeking a place to rest and eat something. Putnam tried to remain composed, but the silence between them was uncomfortable, and he could feel the tension in the air. He had so many questions he wanted to ask her, but he didn't know where to start. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Tubiel spoke to Tunak, breaking the silence.

She tried to pretend that Putnam didn't exist, not out of hatred but out of regret and fear. Then, the awkward silence quickly reappeared and did nothing but grow. The situation became more complicated when Fabio, who knew the story of Putnam and Tubiel's breakup, exchanged a series of glances with Putnam and tried to get Tubiel's attention by reproaching her for what she had done to Putnam in an unfriendly tone. Putnam signaled him not to do anything, but Fabio continued. Tubiel was too tired to say anything, and besides, she was dying of embarrassment because the witcher's friend was right. So, she tried to ignore him more, but it was hard. Putnam's nerves got the best of him, and he punched Fabio. The sudden outburst caught Tubiel's attention, and she turned towards them with a look of surprise and concern. Putnam regretted his actions immediately, but he couldn't take them back. Tubiel made her way over to them and sat where Fabio had been moments before, while Kalina, the bouncer of the place, took Fabio to one of the rooms to try and cure him. While Tunak attended to Tubiel and Putnam trying to ease the tension between the lovers.

Tunak served them both some ale and whispered something in Putnam's ear. He appreciated the boy and saw something nice in both Putnam and Tubiel, despite the obvious tension. After a while, he brought Tubiel her dinner, apologizing for the delay. The conversation began casually, though tense, with Putnam apologizing for the punch. Tubiel asked where he knew Fabio from, and Putnam revealed that Fabio was a friend, though sometimes a jerk. The latter was born of the nervousness present in him, for he was quite fond of Fabio, in spite of

everything.

Putnam went on to explain that he had met Fabio after saving him from being killed by a group of wererats in Oxenfurt the last year. They had taken a liking to each other and had remained in touch by letter ever since. They had met again by chance that very day while he was navigating the canals of the city. Putnam continued to explain to Tubiel how he had been passing through the city to do some shopping for the fortress and to buy some gifts for the upcoming Yule holiday. Tubiel listened intently, feeling a mix of emotions as she heard him speak. She realized that she missed him more than she had realized, and she felt guilty for the way she had treated him in the past. She had done it to protect him, but she couldn't help feeling, that perhaps there could have been another way, which she only realized now.

As the conversation continued, the tension between Putnam and Tubiel began to dissipate slowly. They talked about contracts and their current situations. As both drank their ale and Tubiel ate her dinner, they both started to remember why they fell in love in the first place.

As The night wore on, and as the fire in the fireplace of the tavern dwindled to embers, Putnam and Tubiel found themselves drawn to each other. Without a word, they stood up from their chairs and embraced tightly, as if making up for lost time. They shared a long, passionate kiss, fueled by a year of separation. Tunak, and also Kalina, who had returned, after curing Fabio and leaving him to sleep who watched the scene, gossiping, could not help but get excited and applaud when the kiss happened.

Putnam and Tubiel laughed together once they parted after the kiss, and just as Putnam went to pay Tunak extra for the room, Tunak shook his head, indicating that he would pay him another time. This time, like the ale, it was on the house.

After that, they retired to Putnam's room in the tavern, where they spent the time exploring each other's bodies. It was a night they both knew they would never forget. Every touch, every caress, every whispered word was etched into their memories, fueling the fire of their passion. They had explored each other's bodies with an intensity that bordered on desperation, as if trying to make up for all the time they had spent apart.

Despite the intensity of their lovemaking, there was also a tenderness between them that spoke volumes. They held each other close, tracing gentle fingers over each other's skin, marveling at how familiar yet new everything felt.

They lay there, basking in the afterglow of their love, they knew that there were things they needed to discuss. The issue of the letter hung between them like a weight, a reminder of the challenges they would need to face. But for now, they were content just to be together, to revel in the joy of their reunion. They talked about everything and nothing, laughed and teased, and shared more stories of their time apart. But they knew they couldn't stay holed up in the room forever. They would need to face the world outside, with all its challenges and uncertainties. But for that moment, they were happy just to be together, to have rekindled the flame that had once burned so bright. As they smiled softly at each other, they slowly fell asleep, and the day ended.

The next morning, Putnam and Tubiel awoke to the sound of the city coming to life outside. They quickly dressed and met with Fabio in the tavern's common room. Putnam apologized for the punch, and Fabio just laughed it off, saying that he had been hit harder by worse people. They shared a good-natured laugh, and Fabio bought them breakfast as a peace offering.

After breakfast, they made their way to the canals where they took Putnam's rented gondola to the city's entrances. As Putnam rowed the gondola through the waterways, they took in the sights and sounds of the city and discussed the future, with Fabio inviting Putnam and Tubiel to join his expeditions if he could get some Crown to finance him. They saw merchants setting up their stalls, fishermen hauling in their nets, and locals going about their daily business. Putnam and Tubiel offered Fabio to come to Kaer Seren and stay the winter there, but Fabio refused. He explained that he needed to take advantage of the winter months to secure the financing he required for his expeditions, and he would start with his homeland, Gors Velen.

As they approached the city's entrance, they disembarked from the gondola and said their goodbyes. Fabio hugged Putnam and Tubiel, wishing them luck on their journey to Kaer Seren. Putnam and Tubiel, in turn, wished Fabio a safe journey to Gors Velen. It was a bittersweet moment for Putnam, saying goodbye to a friend they had only just reunited with.

With one last look back at Fabio, who was already walking towards the harbor, Putnam and Tubiel set off towards Kaer Seren, eager to spend the winter together after so long without seeing each other. In addition, Tubiel was looking forward to returning to what had been her home and family for six years. That winter was one of the best for both of them. Tubiel also made history by being the first member of the School of the Cat to set foot in the fortress of the School

of the Griffin in centuries. This was possible because of Keldar's affection for her, and he let her pass. To the old witcher, Tubiel would always be his child, and not what the Cats had made of her. She would always be a Griffin at heart.

During the winter, Tubiel enjoyed reconnecting with the thirty-eight Griffins who had once been her family. She shared stories and memories with them, and they welcomed her back with open arms, thrilled to have her back in their midst. It was a heartwarming reunion for Tubiel, who had missed her Griffin family and the sense of belonging that they gave her when she was only a little girl.

But then, one day, at the end of winter, Tubiel disappeared without giving any explanation to anyone. Putnam and the other Griffins searched for her frantically, but she was nowhere to be found. Putnam felt abandoned again, wondering what he had done wrong. Keldar for his part, was devastated, feeling like he had lost what he considered his adoptive daughter in a way, all over again. The other Griffins were also saddened by her sudden disappearance, wondering where she could have gone. But in the end, they gave up their search, and Keldar assumed it was the fault of the "feralism" of the School of the Cat and she would have her reasons to leave without notice anyone.

Death of his adoptive father and third reencounter with Tubiel (1277)

This year, the witcher suffered a great loss. Which was the loss of his adoptive father, who was killed by prostitutes. A fact that marked him greatly. Adopting after that, the surname Pitch and also abhorring brothels. A few months later, he would meet his beloved Tubiel again. Getting back together, living both in Brenna. Albeit for a short period of time as she would leave him again for the same reason they broke up the first time.

Later, looking for solace. He would meet the sorceress [Triss Merigold](#) with whom he would have a one - night stand and [Dragonfly](#), a witcheress also from the Cat School with whom he would start a relationship. The relationship with Dragonfly would soon and badly end because of her character. Which would leave the witcher with a curious memory in his right buttock.

The Incurable Curse (March, 1277)

"Anika made a great impression on me, at only fourteen years old, she managed to

find a cure for the prince, so, just imagine. For my part, Adalwulf, she has earned my total trust to lead the School of the Gyrfalcon project”

—Putnam, talking to **Adalwulf of Aedirn** during their winter together in **Burov Mylne**

After receiving a letter from his master Keldar, while making some contracts in the sewers of Pont - Vanis mainly from wererats and the occasional zeugl, Putnam made his way to the outskirts of the city, meeting with his father figure. He explained that he had been summoned by the court of Kovir in the city to assist with a mysterious curse that had befallen the prince. Keldar thought he could handle the curse on his own, but after reading descriptions and seeing that it could not be cured, he decided it was preferable to have another witcher covering his back. And after learning that Putnam was in the city, he decided it was a good idea to have him watching his back in case, the curse was too much. Putnam, eager for an opportunity to prove himself, eagerly accepted the mission and accompanied Keldar to the court who was present in the Summer Capital of the kingdom.

Upon arrival at the court, Keldar and Putnam were greeted by the members of the Kovir aristocracy who explained the situation in depth to them. The prince Guiscard had been cursed transforming into an unknown creature every full moon. No one knew what it was, and the closest was the information provided by bourgeois who traded with people from Zangvebar, saying that it was a werehyena. A creature from that exotic and distant country, which was very similar to the local werewolf. Further investigation revealed that the curse was inflicted by a noblewoman from that country, who had been rejected by the prince and wanted to take revenge. Being herself, a werehyena, who infected the prince after biting him. Keldar and Putnam knew they had their work cut out for them, as the crocutathropy was not known and would require a lot of research and experimentation to find a cure. After both witches commented this to the nobles, they were then offered the help of Triss Merigold, the court sorceress and her young apprentice, Anika Masir.

Together, the group of Keldar, Putnam, Triss and Anika set out to find a cure for the curse. They spent long hours in different libraries, researching about therianthropes and their origins. They also consulted with local herbalists and alchemists to gather any possible ingredients that may aid in the cure. As the curse was of exotic origin, the group also sought out information from traders and travelers who had

knowledge of [Zangvebar](#) and its culture. Despite their efforts, the search for a cure seemed fruitless. The crocutathropy was unlike any they had encountered before and traditional methods proved ineffective. As the full moon approached, the group was running out of time to find a cure. But, during their research, Anika discovered an ancient ritual that was said to break curses of most of the therianthropes. Since the magical disease shared certain common traits in spite of the differences among the transformations.

The group quickly put the ritual to the test, gathering the necessary ingredients and performing the ceremony under the light of the full moon. With Putnam and Triss taking care of Anika and Keldar's defense while they performed the ritual. To their surprise, the ritual worked and the prince was cured of his curse. The group had managed to break the curse and save the prince's life. The court of Kovir was overjoyed at the news and showered Keldar, Putnam, Triss and Anika with praise and rewards for their efforts. The prince, who had been isolated and alone for so long, was finally able to return to his normal life.

This event would be one of the future motivators for Triss' apprentice to found the [School of the Gyrfalcon](#) after the events of the Second Conjunction, being the first school of witches that appeared after this important change in the world.

On the other hand, once the curse problem was over.

A party was organized at the royal court with Keldar declining the invitation, but encouraging Putnam to go and set a good example of what the Griffin School could be. Putnam, feeling victorious and proud of his accomplishment, attended the party at the royal court. He was greeted with admiration and gratitude from the members of the Kovir aristocracy, who were relieved that the curse had been lifted from their prince. The party was filled with music, dance, and delicious food, and Putnam found himself mingling with the noble guests, enjoying their company and the sense of accomplishment that came with having successfully completed his mission.

As the night went on, Putnam was approached by the prince, who thanked him personally for his help in lifting the curse and later by Triss who thanked him for his help in performing the ritual and with whom he had developed some closeness which had become a mutual attraction. On Putnam's part, because he was still deeply affected by the break-up with Tubiel and was looking for solace and on the part of Triss, because the sorceress had always had a certain fixation with the witches. Both danced together and had a good time. They drank Toussaint's wine, and went off together, having a one-night stand.

As Triss and Putnam stumbled their way to a secluded chamber in the palace, Triss couldn't help but feel a rush of excitement mixed with apprehension. She had always been cautious about getting involved with witchers, especially after the complications that had arisen with Geralt in the past. But there was something about Putnam that drew her in, something she couldn't quite put her finger on.

As they began to undress, Triss felt a twinge of self-consciousness. She had scars from her time in the battle of Sodden, and although she had learned to accept them, she still felt uneasy about revealing them to someone new. She tried to cover them up with her hair and turned away from Putnam slightly.

But to her surprise, he reached out and gently turned her back towards him, his eyes warm and reassuring. "Triss," he slurred softly, "there's nothing to be ashamed of. You're beautiful just the way you are." Triss felt a flood of emotion at his words, a mixture of gratitude and vulnerability. She let out a deep breath and allowed herself to relax into his embrace, feeling his arms around her and the warmth of his body against hers.

As they made love, Triss found herself lost in the moment, her worries and insecurities fading away. Putnam was gentle and attentive, his touch both passionate and tender. Afterwards, as they lay entwined in each other's arms, Triss felt a sense of contentment. She knew that what had happened between them was likely due to their inebriated state, but she was grateful for the experience nonetheless.

The next morning, Putnam found himself feeling a mix of emotions. He was proud of the work he and his team had accomplished, and grateful for the recognition he had received from the court. However, he couldn't shake off the feeling of guilt for his actions with Triss. So, without a word, while Triss slept, he dressed, took his things and marched back to [The Path](#). Spending a relatively quiet month of April. Being May of that year, a key month for the witcher.

Overall, the experience was bittersweet as, due to his actions in freeing the prince from his curse, he was awarded the rank of elite witcher in the winter of that same year.

The Knight of Flowers (May, 1277)

"The Knight of Flowers may present himself as a mysterious and romantic suitor, but there's an underlying sharpness to his movements that makes me suspect"

"there's more to him than just a jester on horseback."

—Charz on Putnam before discovering his true identity.

After a quiet month of April with scarce contracts, Putnam paid a visit to Indira in Cidaris. She had recently moved to the capital of the kingdom with the same name. Trying to avoid an encounter with Calina, he stayed at The Golden Duck. One evening while having dinner with Indira, an emissary from the King of Cidaris arrived at the tavern. He had come to place an advertisement seeking someone to solve the mysterious deaths occurring in the knight's tournament being held in the city. Recognizing Putnam as a witcher, he offered the contract directly to him, noting that the killer seemed to be a monster hiding among humans.

Putnam, without a second thought and remembering how he had failed in Telmun, accepted the contract.

After a meeting with King Ethain, who provided him with more details about the deaths, Putnam disguised himself as a knight under the pseudonym "The Knight of Flowers." A mysterious knight in golden armor, who never spoke and never took off his helmet. His armor was adorned with intricate engravings of flowers and leaves, which glimmered in the sun's light as he rode his horse across the tournament grounds. His helmet, which covered his entire face, had a small slit for his eyes, making it difficult for anyone to recognize him. As "The Knight of Flowers," Putnam quickly became the talk of the tournament, especially among the noblewomen, whom he enchanted with his chivalrous demeanor and gallant gestures of delivering flowers after each jousting victory, with many speculating about his true identity and origin. Some claimed he was a foreign knight from [Vinland](#), while others said he was a non - human in disguise. However, despite his popularity, he never took off his helmet or spoke a word to anyone, adding to the mystery surrounding him.

But all these gestures were only to draw attention to himself since, with the information received from the king, he realized that for some reason, the assassin had a hatred towards the knights. Therefore, Putnam tried to be as prototypical as possible.

Charz, also a participant in the tournament, was there for personal reasons and was investigating the murders as well. During one of the breaks in the competition, Charz discovered Putnam's true identity after observing some of their gestures during a tournament bout in which the two fought. He realized that their

behavior was too atypical for a knight and offered his help in the murders, which he assumed Putnam had gone to investigate. Putnam then confirmed his identity to Charz, and the two joined forces in the investigation.

After teaming up, Putnam and Charz delved deeper into the mystery surrounding the deaths at the tournament. Their investigation led them to a startling revelation: the culprit behind the killings was none other than one of the sons of Villentretenmerth, a powerful half-black dragon who had taken human form. Rumors abounded that the dragon in question was the semi-mythical Eskaris, but this was never confirmed.

The dragon was seeking revenge on the knights who had hunted dragons in the past, blaming them for the death of his mother. Despite his father's peaceful coexistence with humans, the son harbored a deep-seated anger towards humans and sought to take revenge on them. His plan was to kill as many knights as possible during the tournament, using his shape-shifting abilities to blend in among the crowd and avoid detection.

Putnam and Charz attempted to negotiate with the dragon, hoping to find a peaceful solution to the problem. But their efforts were in vain, as the dragon was too consumed by his desire for revenge. This led to a climactic showdown between the witcher and the knight versus the dragon in its true form.

The battle, which would come to be known as The Black Storm of 1277, was fierce and intense. The dragon was a formidable opponent, and it took all of Putnam and Charz's skills and training to defeat it. In the end, they emerged victorious, but the dragon was not killed. Instead, Charz sent it to Zerrikania to be judged by his father. After defeating it, Charz revealed that he was the dragon's half-brother, a half-purple dragon capable of taking human form.

Once the dragon was defeated, the tournament resumed smoothly, and Charz was proclaimed the winner, with Putnam being defeated by Leondra Garon, the only Lady Knight in the tournament.

Despite the danger they faced, the experience forged a strong bond of friendship between Putnam and Charz. They continued to keep in touch over the years, and after the Second Conjunction and the rise of more monsters, Putnam convinced Charz to join the school he had in mind. Charz accepted and became a valued combat tutor, teaching many students the art of swordplay and melee combat.

Traveling with Trill (May - June 1277)

"Oh my, a knight giving me flowers? How romantic!"

—Trill's initial reaction to Putnam's gift at the tournament.

Putnam, using the pseudonym "The Knight of Flowers," met Trill at the Cidaris Knightly Tournament in May of 1277. Trill, a student at the prestigious Aretuza academy, had abandoned her magic studies to pursue her passion for music and become a bard. With the help of her connections and support from her Aretuza mentors, she was able to showcase her musical talents for the first time at the event. Impressed and eager to take advantage of the rare opportunity to gift a bard, Putnam presented Trill with a large bouquet of roses, hoping to draw more attention to himself and reveal the assassin at the tournament.

Putnam's gift and the enigmatic aura surrounding him as "The Knight of Flowers" at the tournament caught Trill's attention and fueled her curiosity about the man behind the helmet, especially because no other woman in the tournament was given such a gift with so many flowers. Despite not falling in love, she was eager to uncover the true identity of the mysterious knight. Which happened, once the assassin was discovered and defeated by Charz and Putnam, after he took off his helmet, and not only revealed his full true identity to him, but also to the rest of the participants and assistants. Trill, in that moment, she found herself feeling a crush on the witcher.

This meant that immediately once the tournament was over and Putnam and Charz said their goodbyes, Trill approached the witcher and asked to accompany him on his adventures as his personal bard. Putnam, still rather innocent and with his head full of the adventures of his witcher idols such as Geralt of Rivia, Raven and George of Kagen, accepted her company. The two of them traveled together for about a month, crossing Temeria and heading towards Kaedwen in search of contracts. There were rumors that the new king of Kaedwen, Svolt I, had commissioned the mages of Ban Ard to create monsters as weapons in case of a future war against Nilfgaard or Redania, and some of these monsters had escaped. It was during this brief period of time that the two of them developed a romantic relationship.

Trill's impact on Putnam's fame as a witcher was minimal compared to other bards like Jezkier or Xirnedh Jr. Jezkier, who was known for his captivating ballads and lute playing, his songs about Putnam's adventures as a witcher helped to increase his notoriety and reputation. Xirnedh Jr better known as

Xirnedh II on the other hand, was a bard who was making a name for himself with his unique style of music inspired by the "noisy" style of his father, and his imaginative storytelling. He was known for his fantastical tales of witchers and their battles against monsters, and many of his stories featured Putnam as the main character. In comparison, Trill's contribution to Putnam's fame was minor, as she focused more on writing and performing songs that captured the emotion and essence of their time together, rather than promoting him as a witcher.

Her greatest contribution came after her "breakup" or rather, abandonment by Putnam, when two years later she found Tubiel drunk in a tavern. And she wrote, inspired by what she told her, an adaptation of a little-known song by Jaskier, which was a subtle beef to Putnam. Contributing to his infamy as a womanizer. It is said, rumor has it, that there are actually more songs, but that after talking to Tubiel, she modified them to be much more subtle and less direct.

After horseback rides, visits to taverns, completing small contracts, and boat trips, Putnam and Trill's relationship came to an end once they entered temerian territory. During that time, Putnam became increasingly preoccupied with thoughts of Tubiel and realized that she was the only one he truly loved, although he didn't reveal this to Trill. After a performance by the bard and a passionate night with the witcher, Putnam disappeared the next day while Trill was still asleep. He left her a letter, some flowers, and a small sum of money as a token of appreciation. Trill was devastated by Putnam's sudden departure and felt deeply hurt by his unexplained disappearance. Despite her efforts, she was unable to find out any more information about him or where he had gone.

Putnam had gone to Brenna with the hope of finding Tubiel, or at least a clue as to where she might be. He was eager to have another chance at the woman he truly loved and had been preoccupied with thoughts of her for some time. Although it was a long shot, Putnam was determined to search for her and possibly reunite with her.

Eventually Putnam felt a twinge of guilt for leaving Trill without a proper explanation, and it nagged at him over the years. This feeling eventually influenced his decision to save Jezkier and bring him along as a companion during his time in Zerrikania and Ofir.

Reencounter and first life at Brenna with Tubiel (Summer 1277, from June to September approx)

After leaving Trill and heading to Brenna, Putnam

found what he was looking for: Tubiel. Tubiel had returned to her hometown after spending a long year pulling the thread of the sect of mages, and had even discovered their connections with a powerful criminal group called the Gardunnia. Having failed in her last mission, she decided to flee until the waters calmed down, taking refuge in the house that she had managed to buy when she was 16 years old. She had been restoring it little by little with the money she earned, and it was her winter refuge since the dissolution of Dyn Marv's Caravan in 1269. Since the location was not very strategic, and only historical because of the battle. Tubiel supposed that the Gardunnia spies and assassins would not find her there, or so she wanted to think.

For Tubiel, seeing Putnam again after believing that she would lose her life on her last mission was a profound experience. She was overwhelmed with relief and gratitude that he had come to find her, even though she knew, that he didn't know anything about the mages, or the Gardunnia and despite the risks involved, it was as if he had read her mind. The intensity of her emotions showed in the way she clung to him, not wanting to let go for fear that that it might be the last time she could see him again.

As they reunited, the emotions they felt for each other were overwhelming. They looked into each other's eyes, and without a word, they knew they were meant to be together. Tubiel's heart raced as she held on tightly to Putnam, unwilling to break the embrace. It felt as though time had stood still, and nothing else mattered in that moment but the two of them being together. She felt his warmth, heard his steady breathing, and smelled his familiar scent that she had missed so much. It was as if they were the only two people in the world, and all their worries and fears had dissipated.

Putnam, too, was overcome with emotion. He had missed Tubiel so much that words could not express the longing he had felt. As he held her in his arms, he knew that this was where he belonged. For the first time in a long while, he felt at peace. The tension that had been building up inside him over the years melted away as they embraced each other. They both knew that they would do anything to stay together, no matter what the future held.

Their reconciliation was unlike any other they had experienced before. Instead of tension and questions, there was a sense of mutual longing and a deep connection that needed no words. They embraced each other, their bodies pressed together in a tight hug that conveyed all the emotions they had been

holding back for so long. As they kissed, they felt a deep sense of relief and joy, as if the world had finally fallen into place.

For Putnam, seeing Tubiel again after months was a relief beyond words. He had been so worried about her safety and well-being since her disappearance from Kaer Seren, even if he had tried not to, that seeing her in his arms once more filled him with a sense of joy and happiness he had not felt in a long time. He held her tightly, his own emotions overwhelming him, and knew that he would do anything to protect her and keep her safe.

After an emotional and passionate reconciliation, Tubiel and Putnam decided to spend the summer in Brenna. After so long, they needed some time without monsters, political plots, contracts, and the constant risk to their lives. They wanted a quiet life, just the two of them. They quickly adapted to this new lifestyle. They discussed their past, their hopes, and their fears for the future. They even talked about the possibility of starting a family and adopting a child. The idea of giving a child a loving home and a stable life brought a glimmer of hope to both of them.

As they settled into their new routine, Putnam and Tubiel found joy in the simple pleasures of life. They spent their days just enjoying each other's company and all that Brenna had to offer. Although Putnam didn't fully retire from being a witcher, he only took on occasional contracts that didn't require him to travel far from Brenna. This gave them more time to focus on their relationship and enjoy their peaceful life.

During their time in Brenna, Putnam honed his fishing skills and became quite skilled at catching fish in the river. They enjoyed fresh fish for dinner most nights, and when they had extra, Putnam would sell it to the local market for a small profit. Tubiel enjoyed watching him work, fascinated by the way he effortlessly caught fish after fish. Tubiel, for her part, when they were most in need of money, offered her services as a healer in the town, for the elderly in the area.

Their time in Brenna was idyllic, but their peace was shattered in mid-August when Putnam's adoptive father, Johan Pitch, passed through Brenna while running errands for The Griffins and on his way to Kaer Seren. He was murdered by local prostitutes shortly after saying goodbye to Putnam and Tubiel. Everyone assumed it was a robbery-murder, and the prostitutes were arrested and hanged. However, Tubiel knew it was a warning from the Gardunnia to her.

Putnam was consumed by grief and anger upon learning of his adoptive father's murder. He couldn't believe that the prostitutes had killed Johan Pitch and refused to accept the official explanation of a robbery gone wrong during some time. In an act of madness, Putnam considered burning down the local brothel where the prostitutes worked, blaming them for Johan's death. He felt a strong urge to take revenge on those responsible and make them pay for their crimes. However, Tubiel managed to calm him down before he could do anything rash. She reminded him that violence would not bring back his father and that in any case, even if it was not what the official authorities claimed, the person responsible was more than certainly dead.

He couldn't bear the thought that his adoptive father was gone forever, and he struggled to come to terms with his death. After Johan's murder, Putnam took charge of arranging his adoptive father's funeral. He was devastated to see Johan's lifeless body, and it was only then that the reality of his death hit him fully. After all this, to honor the memory of the man who saved his life when he only was a baby, he decided to abandon his old name of Putnam of Skellige, and to change his name to Putnam Pitch, the name by which he would eventually become known, and by which he would eventually be remembered after his death in the future.

Tubiel was also deeply affected by Johan's murder. She knew that the Gardunnia had sent a warning to her and that her own safety was in jeopardy. Tubiel became more vigilant, watching her every move and staying alert to any potential danger. She was determined not to let Putnam get caught up in the danger that surrounded her. So in September of that year, to protect what she loved most, and willing to put an end to the sect of mages and their allies once and for all, or lose her life in the process, Tubiel decided to break up with Putnam again. This time was face to face, and she used their biological differences as a reason, although it was more of an excuse, which left Putnam feeling even more marked by the events that had transpired. He was devastated by the breakup and struggled to cope not only with the death of his adoptive father but also with the loss of the love of his life. Months later, he would try to move away from the Northern Kingdoms, as he felt that he needed a fresh start and a chance to heal from the events that had transpired.

Stay at Dyn Marv with the first lynxes and romance with Dragonfly (September - December 1277)

"Pitch, you're a liability to us. I never trusted you, something about you just doesn't sit right with me. And now you're cozying up to Keira? Don't get too comfortable, mark my words, it won't end well for you."

—Lambert to Putnam during his time in Dyn Marv

After the death of his adoptive father and his breakup with Tubiel, Putnam set out on The Path and encountered the caravan of the reformed School of the Lynx, once known as the extinct Cat School witches, near Maribor. Despite Lambert's prejudice against the Griffin School, due to Aiden's negative comments, the Lynxes welcomed Putnam to join them as an observer, with the goal of showing the other Witcher Schools that they had changed and were no longer the immoral killers they once were. Although this was not entirely the case, since a faction of The Cats survivors of the dissolution of the caravan led by D'yaebł, disagreed with Lambert and left to pursue their previous purpose, trying to recover Stygga, although this was in vain.

As a show of good faith, the School of the Lynx offered to accompany Putnam to Kovir to try to convince Old Keldar, the leader of the Griffin School, to collaborate with them and other witcher schools. Putnam, with his noble and optimistic spirit, agreed and joined them on their journey. This event and similar initiatives laid the groundwork for Adalwulf of Aedirn's Witcher's Reformation Act, aimed at promoting unity and cooperation among the witcher schools.

During his travels with the School of the Lynx, Putnam met Dragonfly, a co-leader of the school, and despite initial reservations and tensions among some members, including Lambert, Joël, and Gaetan, Putnam and Dragonfly formed a connection. Their relationship grew stronger as they spent more time together, and they eventually became romantically involved, influenced by both Putnam's charisma and the aftermath of his previous breakup.

Their romantic involvement began slowly, with small gestures of affection and understanding. They would often find themselves sitting by the fire, talking late into the night, and sharing stories of their lives and experiences.

However, the journey and relationship was not without its challenges. Many of the members of the School of the Lynx, including Dragonfly, had struggled with mental health issues stemming from their upbringing as Cat Witchers, as well as the side effects of the mutations that gave them heightened emotions. Despite Putnam's best efforts, Dragonfly's jealousy eventually became a major problem in their

relationship, fueled by her mutated emotions. She had grown up in a world where trust was a luxury, and she struggled to overcome her fear that Putnam would leave her for someone else. Despite his efforts to reassure her, Dragonfly's jealousy continued to create tension between them. This was a new and intense experience for Putnam, who had only dealt with milder forms of jealousy with Tubiel, who was not mutated. Despite these difficulties, Putnam was determined to support Dragonfly and help her overcome her struggles, but he soon realized that this was a much greater challenge than he had anticipated.

During one such episode of toxic jealousy, Dragonfly and Putnam had a passionate encounter, which unfortunately turned violent. As a result, Dragonfly left a scar on Putnam's right buttock, a permanent reminder of the experience for the witcher.

The incident occurred one night when Dragonfly and Putnam had been arguing about his interactions with another member of the School of the Lynx, more specifically, Keira. Despite Putnam's reassurances that he was committed to their relationship, Dragonfly's jealousy had reached an all-time high. Their argument quickly escalated, fueled by their heightened emotions and the intensity of their physical attraction to each other. In a moment of intense emotion, Dragonfly lashed out at Putnam, overpowering him as she pushed him onto the bed.

What started as a heated argument quickly turned into a physical altercation, with both of them struggling for dominance. Despite the violence of the encounter, there was an undeniable passion between them, which only fueled the intensity of their actions. As the encounter progressed, Dragonfly's jealousy and rage turned into a desperate need for possession, and she left a deep scratch on Putnam's right buttock with her nails.

In addition to the tensions brought on by Dragonfly's struggles with her emotions and mental health,

Lambert also proved to be a hindrance, as he constantly acted hostile towards Putnam and failed to offer any support to his co-leader. Instead of helping Dragonfly, Lambert merely told her to seek assistance from Putnam, whom he insultingly referred to as "Pitch". Meanwhile, Putnam spent a lot of time working with Keira, the school's mage and Lambert's partner, to help stabilize their mutations and find a cure for the Catriona Plague. During this time, Keira, perhaps drawn to Putnam's charm and elegance, began to flirt with him. This further irritated Lambert and Dragonfly, adding to the already strained dynamic within the group but despite Keira's advances, Putnam did not engage in the

flirtation. He appreciated her attention but remained professional and focused on their work, politely redirecting their conversations back to their task at hand. Despite Keira's persistent playfulness, Putnam was steadfast in maintaining a purely professional relationship with her to ensure that their work was not compromised. However, 11 years later, their paths crossed once again and they eventually started a relationship.

Once they arrived at their destination, Putnam said farewell to the caravan and returned to spend the rest of the winter in Kaer Seren, ending his relationship with Dragonfly. He submitted a mixed report to Keldar, which, due to Keldar's interpretation of the events that had taken place, led to the failure of any attempts at unifying the Witcher's Guild until the early 14th century.

Working for the Zerrikanian Spice Company (1278)

*I owe him my life, and my future is bright
I'll sing of his deeds, and make them take flight
He's the Golden Griffin, and I'm his bard
We'll go down in history, and make our mark*
—Jezkier singing Under The Golden Wing

During a relatively calm winter in Kaer Seren, in which Putnam made efforts to put his mind and emotions in order with relative success, the young witcher was eager to escape the Northern Kingdoms due to all that had happened. One day, during a supply trip for the fortress in early December, he saw an announcement that the Zerrikanian Spice Company was looking for caravan bodyguard personnel while passing near their second headquarters in Lan Exeter. The new headquarters had been created because of the economic facilities offered by Kovir and the instability of Novigrad. So, without thinking too much, he accepted the offer and joined them, leaving the following month towards Zerrikania.

They traveled using a mixture of ships and other transportation, like portals and what could be considered a derivative of an Aerd Gaeth or a portal upgrade, but of much greater range, allowing the spice-gathering caravan to evade the dangerous wastelands, this portal of wider range was located in Tir Tochair following a diplomatic treaty, between the gnomes and Zerrikania. Before arriving to the queendom, they made a stop at the Novigrad headquarters for the rest of the personnel to join them. The group was a mix of Zerrikanian warriors and traders, along with Nordlings. Curiously, among them was his teenage crush and

horseback riding teacher, the witcheress Adela. It was also around that time that he met a young seven-year-old Brynn while shopping in Novigrad before departing which, together with his experience in Ofir that year and the next, became key to the total acceptance of his future adopted son, Sigurd.

Near Tir Tochair, a few hours before reaching the portal, while all the members were having lunch and Adela was taking a nap, Putnam heard a noise with his enhanced hearing. At first, he thought it was an animal or a monster, but when he moved forward, he found Jezkier being attacked by a gang of gnomes who wanted to steal the bard's lute. Without hesitation, Putnam stepped in and fought off the gnomes, saving Jezkier from harm. Grateful for the witcher's help, Jezkier offered to help him with anything.

After the defeat of the gnomes, Jezkier introduced himself and explained that he was a bard on his way to the location of the School of the Viper fortress, hoping to find a witcher who could inspire him and help him reach the same level as his idol, Jaskier with epic tales against The Wild Hunt. Putnam, feeling sorry for Jezkier's innocence and remembering Trill, explained to him that the fortress, and therefore the School of the Viper, had been destroyed by the imperial army a long time ago. There he would find nothing but ruins and half-destroyed books. It was then that Putnam invited him to join the Zerrikanian Spice Company's caravan, assuming that the rest of the members would appreciate some entertainment besides playing Dice Poker, Gwent, or Backgammon.

After Putnam explained to Jezkier that the School of the Viper had been destroyed, the bard's face fell. He had been hoping to find his inspiration there and was disappointed that it was no longer possible. However, his disappointment didn't last long, and he soon realized that joining the Zerrikanian Spice Company's caravan would provide him with new opportunities to grow as a bard.

Jezkier was happy to oblige and joined the Zerrikanian Spice Company's caravan, providing them with songs and stories to liven up their journey. Inspired by his idol Jaskier and his stories with Geralt of Rivia, Jezkier began to weave tales of adventure, love and heroism, a mix of Jaskier songs that he knew like "*Toss a Coin To Your Witcher*", "*Her Sweet Kiss*", "*Winter*". "*Elaine Ettarial*" among others inspired by what the Griffin witcher told him from time to time about his life, being his first original hit "*Under The Golden Wing*" followed by the "*The Lioness of Brenna*", "*Wildfire*", etc... This first hit was based on Putnam

intervention and also inspired in Geralt's nickname of "*The White Wolf*" that gave Putnam the nickname "*The Golden Griffin*", a name that would stick with him for years to come.

Defending national trade routes and travelling south (January - March 1278)

As they journeyed further south, the landscapes became more diverse and fascinating. The forests that they had encountered in the north of Zerrikania were gradually replaced by dry deserts, product of the lack of water and the natural barrier of the mountains, dotted with rocky outcrops and scrubland, where the only signs of life were the occasional herd of Zerrikanian Camels or gazelles as they reach zones closer to the Frying Pan. As they ventured deeper into the territory, the vegetation became denser, and they found themselves in dense jungles, filled with exotic and colorful wildlife. Despite the novelty of their surroundings, the job of guarding the caravan was not without its dangers.

Putnam and Adela had to stay on high alert at all times, keeping watch for any signs of danger. They encountered different monsters unknown to Putnam along the way, including the devi, a type of ogroid with horns, and the dobilni, spirits of pestilence, which Putnam learned to defeat with Adela's guidance after she was wounded in a confrontation.

One particular encounter that stood out to Putnam was the battle against the gveleshapi, a fearsome water monster that they faced together on Lake Merin. The creature was huge and had a powerful, serpentine body that allowed it to move quickly and efficiently through the water. With much effort, they both managed to defeat it, impressing the other members of the caravan.

During their journey, they passed through the capital of Zerrikania, Villette. Feeling inspired by the local fashion, Putnam decided to adopt a more Zerrikanian look for himself. He changed in his medium Griffin armor for lighter armor with parts made of linen and silk, adorned with colorful patterns and embroidery. He even grew out his beard a little and braided his hair in the style he had seen on some of the Zerrikanian men. Adela was amused by Putnam's new look, but also impressed by his willingness to adapt to the local culture. She appreciated how he always sought to learn and grow, even in unfamiliar environments like when

she taught him how to ride a horse when he was only a teenager. As they worked together Putnam and Adela's relationship developed beyond their foster cousin bond. Putnam was drawn to Adela's intelligence, bravery, and wit, that reminded him of Tubiel, and made him think that "one devil drives out another" while Adela was drawn to Putnam's sense of humor and loyalty. Despite the challenges they faced, they supported and cared for each other, deepening their connection. Jezkier, who was aware of their feelings for each other, encouraged their relationship and sought inspiration for his songs.

Despite Putnam's initial hesitation to pursue a romantic relationship with Adela, as he didn't want to jeopardize their friendship, he eventually couldn't resist his feelings and they started dating. Their relationship only grew stronger as they continued to travel, making time for each other and sharing moments of conversation, laughter, and love.

Sadly, their relationship lasted for only one month, as Adela passed away killed by a basilisk.

"The Price of Innocence" (March 1278)

*"Beyond the womb, a story to tell,
Of a wooden boy, and the demon's spell.
Of battles fought, and monsters slain,
Of love and loss, and a mother's pain."*

—Jezkier singing Beyond the Womb

One day, as the caravan continued its journey southward before turning eastward and arriving at Raemeth to collect spices, Putnam and Adela were sent on a mission to investigate the strange occurrences happening in a small village that were disrupting normal passage. As they approached the village, they could feel the tension in the air, and the villagers' angry shouts grew louder. Putnam and Adela could see that the people were all around the temple, loaded with all kinds of weapons, and shouting for the High Priestess Saulrenith to come out and answer for her heresy.

Despite the dangerous situation, Putnam and Adela pressed on towards the temple. As they got closer, they noticed that the temple looked like it had been vandalized. The doors were broken and the windows were shattered. Inside, they could hear Saulrenith's voice, pleading with the villagers to calm down and listen to reason.

As Putnam and Adela entered the vandalized

temple, they were immediately met with hostility from the angry villagers, who pointed their weapons towards them. In an effort to diffuse the situation, Putnam raised his hands in a peaceful gesture and Adela stepped forward, speaking in the Zerrrikanian Dialect to address the crowd. "We are here to investigate the situation and find out what happened. Please put down your weapons and let us speak with the High Priestess."

With some hesitation, the crowd eventually lowered their weapons and allowed Putnam and Adela to make their way through to the temple's entrance. Inside, they found Saulrenith, the High Priestess, who was a commanding figure with piercing eyes and a regal bearing. She wore a long, flowing robe of deep purple, and her long hair was braided and adorned with jewels.

As they approached the priestess, they noticed a small wooden puppet with a six years old boy aspect in the corner of the room watching them but unlike a golem, it did not wait for orders, but seemed to be "really" alive. The priestess explained that this puppet was the cause of the "heresy" that had disrupted the village.

However, she clarified that it was actually her son, made in a different way than usual, but still her son. She also stated that he had done nothing wrong and was not a product of Niya's demonic corruption, from which the dragons that were worshipped in all the country including the village, were said to protect them. This seemed strange to Putnam and Adela, and they asked the priestess to explain how she "made" her son. She then explained that one day while she was praying to the dragons in the temple, asking to recover her fertility, a mysterious merchant appeared and offered her to make a deal: he would give her a "son" in exchange for her signing an "exclusivity contract" and after that, the wooden puppet she was making as a offering, came to life.

As they listened to the priestess's story, Putnam and Adela were both intrigued and disturbed. It was hard for them to believe that a wooden puppet could come to life and be someone's child. However, they could see the love and affection the priestess had for her "son", and they couldn't deny that he seemed alive and conscious.

Curious, Putnam asked the priestess, more about the merchant who had offered her the deal and Adela translated. As Adela translated Putnam's questions to the priestess, they both grew increasingly concerned about the mysterious merchant who had offered the priestess the deal. The priestess admitted that she did not

know much about him, but she was desperate for a child and saw the opportunity as a miracle. She signed the contract without hesitation, and soon after, the wooden puppet she had been finishing came to life as her "son." Calling him, Ki'Fioda translated : "*the one who came from beyond the womb*".

Putnam and Adela then exchanged a fast worried glance while they listened carefully to the priestess's new but vague information while observed her son from a distance. They noticed that he seemed to be in his own world, playing with the animal guts of the temple 's sacrifices and other strange objects. Despite his odd behavior, he did not seem to be a threat to anyone.

The priestess pleaded with them to help her protect her son from the angry villagers who had already vandalized the temple in their rage. She feared that they might harm him if they found him alone. Putnam and Adela understood her concerns and promised to help.

They advised the priestess to keep her son hidden for the time being until they could get to the bottom of the situation. The priestess agreed and thanked them for their help. Putnam and Adela knew that they had a difficult task ahead of them. As both Griffins delved deeper into their investigation, they began to uncover more disturbing information about the offers the "merchant" had made to the villagers. Each offer seemed to be more curious and suspicious than the last, leading them to suspect that it was some kind of demon behind it all. The villagers, however, were skeptical of the idea of demons, instead believing that the High Priestess had used forbidden but not dark magic to create the wooden boy.

To get more answers, Adela and Putnam decided to seek out the "madwoman of the town," an old woman who was said to have deceived demons in the past and subsequently gone mad. Others claimed that she simply hit her head shortly after moving to the village and had been that way ever since. Regardless of the truth of her origins, they hoped she could shed some light on the situation.

Just as they were about to get confirmation of their suspicions a voice from beyond the grave echoed throughout the village. The wooden boy had revealed his true nature as a liche in disguise, brought to that plane by a demon as part of an alliance to cause chaos and gain benefits. However, the intervention of the witchers forced him to accelerate his plans, leading to his exposure.

Putnam and Adela rushed towards the source of the sound, ready to confront the liche disguised as a wooden boy. As they arrived at the temple, they saw the

liche standing over the priestess, who had fallen to the ground dead. The liche turned to face the witchers, his eyes glowing with an otherworldly light and fearlessly revealing to them that the exclusivity contract was nothing more than a deception to steal the priestess' soul and use it to increase its power as a developing liche.

In a desperate move to protect itself, the weak liche summoned a horde of monsters created and mutated by its magic to attack the witchers, among them a basilisk. Putnam and Adela organized themselves, going after the other monsters first, which were basically zombies that the liche managed to raise, then the basilisk, and finally, the liche itself. In the heat of battle, Adela was killed by the basilisk, leaving Putnam to face the creature alone.

Grief-stricken by Adela's death, Putnam was consumed with the desire for revenge and fought the basilisk with a fierce determination. His silver sword struck the basilisk with precision. The battle lasted for what felt like an eternity, but in reality, it was only a matter of minutes. In the end, Putnam emerged victorious, but it was a hollow victory as he had lost Adela in the process.

As he grieved for Adela, Putnam was forced to confront it and find a way to stop it before it caused any more harm. As Putnam faced Ki'Fioda, he was filled with anger, in a matter of seconds, he raised his two hands and used a more powerful version of the Igni Sign. The wooden body of Ki'Fioda was quickly consumed, reduced to nothing but ashes and smoke. Though he knew he hadn't destroyed the liche itself, at least he had destroyed its physical form.

Feeling emotionally drained, Putnam fell to his knees beside Adela's lifeless body. He couldn't shake off the feeling that he should have been able to protect her, to save her. But at least, at that instant, one could pass through the village without having been confronted by a horde of angry people and having been assaulted or extorted. He took Adela's body in his hands and returned with the caravan. Adela was buried on the outskirts of the village as best as the members of the caravan could. The caravan, too, was devastated by the death of a member who had been with them for so many years, but they had to move on. The guilt and regret weighed heavily on Putnam's heart, and he knew that this loss would stay with him for a long time to come. It was another of the small steps that would leave him with a great sense of guilt after the events of 1280 and would take a long time to heal.

Jezkier, after being told the story by the witcher, would write a song about the

incident and Adela's sacrifice, which would become a popular folk song in the Northen Kingdoms and some far away territories like [Vinland](#), and would serve as a reminder of the dangers of playing with powerful magic and the importance of understanding the consequences of one's actions. Jezkier would also make a point of dedicating the song to Adela every time he would perform it, as a way to honor her memory and the role she played in stopping Ki ' Fioda.

"Killing gods" (April 1278)

*"Golden Griffin, fierce and brave,
Faced the dragon, in a deadly game,
With sword in hand, and witcher's might,
He emerged victorious, in the darkest night.
With every step, towards his fate,
He'll make his mark, before it's too late..."*

—Jezkier - The Darkest Night

After a few weeks of travel that seemed eternal to the witcher, who was trying to cope with Adela's death and was once again preoccupied (albeit slightly) with Tubiel's situation, wherever she may be, and despite Jezkier's attempts to cheer him up with all kinds of songs, they finally arrived in Raemeth. There, they began the process of collecting and preparing the spices for sale.

Everything was normal during their time in the city. Putnam made some contracts, learned about the local culture, and even saved Jezkier from two Zerrikanian warriors whom he had unintentionally insulted in their dialect when he was actually trying to propose a threesome with them. The hard part began when they began their return trip.

After taking advantage of the river's current and boarding a ship, the journey back to the Northen Kingdoms seemed to be going smoothly for the caravan members. They were relieved to have saved several weeks of travel time, which would allow them to return much faster. However, they knew that the hardest part of the journey was yet to come. They still had to cross the treacherous southern Zerrikanian mountains with the precious cargo of spices.

As they began their ascent up the mountains, the caravan members could feel the exhaustion taking over their bodies. Finally, after days of arduous travel, they arrived at the temple of the local, Ra'Ddraig, the [Onyx Dragon](#), Chernobog. The temple was located in what was once a remote and isolated area, but which was gradually turning into a city surrounded by majestic mountains that towered

above them. The temple was considered a sacred place by the locals and it was believed that offering sacrifices to the dragon would bring good luck and protection to the caravan.

Chernobog, was a powerful and feared creature that lived in the Northern Kingdoms and Nilfgaard before migrating to Zerrikania. His impact on the Elder Races was so significant that a rune was named after him. Upon arriving at the temple, the caravan members were graciously offered food, shelter, and other basic services. Despite being full, they were allowed the great honor of sleeping in the same room where the dragon rested.

The caravan leader was the first to approach the dragon and inquire about its demands for a sacrifice. The dragon's request was for the spices, which left the leader in a difficult position. The spices were the source of their livelihood, and they would have nothing to sell if they gave them to the dragon. The leader attempted to negotiate with the powerful creature, offering alternative sacrifices, but Chernobog insisted on the spices. Finally, they came to a pact that allowed the caravan leader a few hours to discuss the matter with the rest of the caravan. Which the leader did not do, because he preferred to offer himself as a sacrifice to the dragon than to ruin the business. As the rest of the caravan slept, the leader stayed awake and negotiated with the dragon.

However, the dragon was not appeased and attacked the caravan in the middle of the night. Its fire and fury were so intense that most of the members were killed, except for Putnam and Jezkier. Putnam had tried to use a powerful Quen Sign to protect them all, but failed, leaving him with a second-degree burn scar on his back as a souvenir of the encounter. Putnam managed to face the dragon with his silver sword while protecting Jezkier, and In a stroke of luck, was able to kill the creature.

The priestesses and the other people that were resting in the temple that night, including locals after what happened, they saw Putnam as not only responsible for not convincing the caravan leader to make the proper sacrifices, but also for the death of their god .They believed that by not making the sacrifices, Putnam had angered the dragon and brought misfortune to the community. The fact that Putnam, by sheer luck, ended up killing the dragon, was seen as a sacrilege by the locals, who considered the Onyx Dragons to be powerful benevolent beings that bring prosperity and good luck to those who appease them.

In addition, some locals also accused Putnam of wanting to keep the spices for

himself, which they believed was a personal greed that led to the deaths of their fellow Zerrikanians. They believed that if Putnam had not been so greedy, the dragon would not have attacked the caravan and that the members would still be alive. All of these factors contributed to the strong anti-Putnam sentiment among the locals and the demand for him to be held accountable for the deaths of their fellow Zerrikanians.

Putnam and Jezkier, of course, tried to escape, but Putnam second degree burn in the back affected him enough to be quickly subdued and arrested by the Zerrikanian warriors. After that he was taken to the local authorities for trial.

Putnam's imprisonment and trial (Late April 1278)

Putnam was imprisoned by the local authorities following the destruction of the Zerrikanian Spice Company Caravan and was charged with various crimes, including failing to protect the caravan members, angering the Onyx Dragon by not offering the proper sacrifices, and attempting to keep the spices for himself. All crimes are considered very serious. Putnam was innocent, but of course, the only "witness" that remained was Jezkier, who was not impartial because he was a friend of the witcher. So, the version of events of those who arrived at the scene, after Putnam killed the dragon, were accepted.

The trial was held in a public square, where many locals have gathered to witness the proceedings. Putnam was given the opportunity to defend himself with the help of a translator, but the "evidence" against him was overwhelming and the authorities found him guilty of all charges. He was sentenced to death by crucifixion, a brutal and inhumane punishment meant to be a public spectacle and a deterrent to others from committing similar crimes.

Putnam's crucifixion, the witcher is saved at the last moment due to Jezkier's negotiation with ofiris diplomats

“Hey, I saved your life. You should be grateful. And besides, rescuing a princess sounds like a pretty exciting adventure. think of the tales you'll have to tell.”

—Jezkier to Putnam during their way to **Ofir**

The crucifixion was a brutal and inhumane form of punishment, where the person was tied to a large wooden cross, stripped and left to die, in Zerrikania was used with the most dangerous criminals, dragon slayers among them. In fact, after the trial, Putnam became known as *Raul Ddraig Alqatil* (translated as *Evil Dragon Slayer*). Putnam was crucified in a public square, where many locals

have gathered to witness the punishment. The crucifixion was a slow and painful death, and Putnam was suffering for a long time. He remained on the cross for several days, it is not known how many, some say three days, others say as many as five, he was barely conscious, on the brink of death, when Jezkier, arrived with the Ofiri diplomatic body and negotiated his release with the local authorities.

Jezkier found himself in a difficult situation. He was not considered guilty by the locals, but he didn't know what to do to help his friend. In desperation, he searched the area for anything that might be of help and stumbled upon the Ofiri embassy by chance. Once there, Jezkier apparently "seduced" the main diplomat, in reality, the diplomat only pretended to be seduced, and Jezkier told her the whole story of what had happened. The diplomat, recognizing the possible witcher's origin through his eyes, offered to Jezkier, negotiate a contract on Putnam's behalf. The contract was to rescue the ofiri princess in exchange for the witcher release. This was a win-win situation for both parties, as the Ofiri Crown were looking for a skilled warrior to rescue their princess and Putnam was looking for a way out of his predicament.

The contract made Putnam technically a tool of the Ofiri Crown, which, if he was killed, could be considered a cause for war. This was a powerful bargaining chip for the Ofiri and it made the local authorities think twice before rejecting the proposal since they didn't want to provoke a war with Far South land. As a result, Putnam was released and was given all the necessary medical care while being transported to the country. Although Putnam scolded Jezkier once he recovered for getting him into a political mess, remembering his bad experience in Melukka, he quickly understood that the bard had no choice. If it weren't for him, he would be dead.

Additionally, the Ofiri diplomat had a hidden agenda. She knew that Putnam's possible real origin would be of great interest to Nibras if the rumors of the ruler's youth were true. She saw this as an opportunity to gain the favor of the Malliq.

Rescue of the ofieri princess and hunt of the Hunter of Zangvebar (1278 - 1279)

"I can't believe you got me into this mess, Jezkier. Keldar is going to be furious, not to mention breaking my neutrality again. And on top of all that, I have to tell him about Adela's death. It's a heavy weight on my shoulders. I just want to go back to

my simple life as a witcher, not get involved in political affairs.”

—Putnam to Jezkier near Nibras’s palace

After four months of travel, the witcher and the bard finally arrived in Ofir in the month of August, and more specifically, in Manisa, the capital of the entire kingdom after the unification of the territory, with Putnam somewhat resigned to fulfilling the contract but taking it better, and the bard anxious to know what songs the muses would inspire him to create in that exotic and distant land.

During that time, Putnam spent his time training and studying, learning more about the culture, creatures, and languages of the country in order to be more independent in case of any unforeseen events. He grew a better beard, tried to speak with the Ofiris in their common tongue (although with relative success), practiced his movements with the armor they let him wear, and so on. That time of study also served him to distract himself and not focus so much on the thoughts about Tubiel that had arisen again and become frequent after Adela's death.

Jezkier, for his part, tried to encourage him, saying that in Ofir he would find a better, prettier woman than Tubiel, and that she would move her hips in such a way that she would make him act like an idiot. Putnam would reply with a disapproving look, and then give him a slap, or in more extreme cases, break the papyrus where he was composing his new song.

He did not become an expert, but he did learn enough to know how to handle himself in case he needed to. Still, he was told that due to the complicated situation, he would have all the help he could ask for to make his mission a success. The country was on the verge, and they doubted that the young princess Nurshah would last more than three years in captivity. They would sacrifice her before that if Nibras still did not agree to the kidnappers' demands.

When they arrived, they were taken to the summer palace of Nibras and received with all kinds of honors, at the level of foreign dignitaries. This shocked the witcher, but not the bard, who enjoyed it too much. Once inside the palace, introductions were made, and Putnam was spellbound by Radeyah's presence and beauty when she entered the room. Jezkier had to snap him out of his reverie. The sorceress then acted as translator and made the appropriate introductions between Nibras and her guests.

After the events of 1273, Radeyah had regained her position, but she was in a

very fragile position where Nibras didn't quite trust her. Despite this, he had given her a second chance, and in the five years that had passed, she hadn't failed him. Nibras was happy about this, as he was too old to look for a new Crown Sorcerer/Sorceress, especially in these complicated times.

Once the four were reunited, the situation was explained to the witcher and his companion. During the whole talk, there was a strange tension between the witcher and Nibras, exchanging glances as if they didn't quite believe it. The truth was that father and son were face to face after so many years. Putnam and Nibras were very similar physically, with the biggest differences being in their skin tones and some traits that Putnam had inherited from his mother. Putnam's eyes, although mutated, still had the same color and conveyed as much emotion as those of the disappeared Nelea, making Nibras doubt every time he caught a glimpse of the witcher. Was he his lost son, or were those eyes the product of some strange mutation, like the ones that the witches of the extinct [School of the Scorpion](#) made to their students?

In any case, the complex and hurried situation made them discard all those thoughts. Putnam for his part, saw in the Malliq a strange, but at the same time familiar, old reflection of himself.

The princess Nurshah, who was only six years old, had been kidnapped a year ago by what was believed to be one of the country's mage organizations. The mages demanded mostly, the independence of certain satrapies in exchange for returning the only heir to the throne. Nibras refused the offer, as it had taken his family much effort to unify Ofir, and he did not want it to fragment again.

Initially, they had considered turning to mages or even the Crown Assassin to solve the problem and rescue Nurshah. However, Nibras feared that it was part of a larger conspiracy of sorcerers and decided to send a letter to all the embassies to search for a foreign warrior who was not "contaminated" by the corruption of the sorcerers' ideals or, worse, bought off.

During the talk, Radeyah realized this and more things, such as gestures they shared and did without realizing it. This made her plans from five years ago resurface, but in a more subtle way. She only needed to manipulate the witcher, and the power would be hers. Luckily, all of this would not be carried out because the charisma of the Griffin and the subsequent relationship they would have would make her change her mind.

It was also explained to him that they would begin the rescue by investigating

the few traces that the possible mages had left throughout that year in their communications. These mages had been very careful to dilute their traces leaving only a few, very vague. They expected the witcher, with his skills, to solve the matter in the shortest possible time and bring the princess back safe and sound. Radeyah would act as their guide and provide help if needed. In the meantime, Kaledi would take her place in the court.

Celebration to encourage Putnam and one - night stand with Towşan

“Come on in, the water is lovely”

—Putnam

Once the talk was over and the orders were given to the witcher and his companion, a party was celebrated to motivate them. The party was relatively modest compared to what Nibras was used to doing, but it was a celebration nonetheless.

The party was held in the grand hall of Nibras' palace, a spacious room with tall pillars adorned with intricate carvings and elaborate chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The room was decorated with rich fabrics in vibrant colors of red, blue, and gold, and aromatic candles flickered on every surface. A group of musicians played traditional Ofiri instruments, filling the room with lively melodies and rhythmic beats that made the guests tap their feet and sway their hips. Jezkier eventually joined the musicians over the course of the evening, driven by his professional curiosity, bardic ego, and the alcohol he had consumed. He played the lute and sang, engaging in an intense musical duel with the court hanım sazende Nibras, Aylin.

The guests, the vast majority, people of the court, were dressed in their finest clothes, with the women of the harem wearing long flowing dresses and intricate headpieces, and men wearing embroidered robes. They mingled and chatted, sipping on sweetened tea and nibbling on platters of savory delicacies. There were plates of stuffed grape leaves, shish taouk spiced lamb kebabs, mujadara, pide and crispy falafel balls, among other dishes.

As the night went on, the party became more lively. A group of belly dancers performed sensuous dances, their hips swaying to the beat of the music. Some guests joined in, trying to mimic the intricate movements of the dancers, while others sat back and enjoyed the show, among them Putnam who, while reflecting on the whole situation, tried to enjoy the party, and prevent the bard from doing something stupid.

With the party winding down, Nibras, being a generous host, offered to share his harem with Jezkier and the witcher. However, Putnam excused himself and retired to his room, hoping to get some much-needed rest but his mind was filled with thoughts about the mission and the potential dangers that lay ahead. He decided to go in search of Jezkier, hoping to share his concerns with him.

As Putnam wandered through the palace corridors, his mind still filled with worries about the mission, he heard muffled sounds coming from one of the rooms. His curiosity piqued, he pushed the door open and was shocked to find Jezkier in a compromising position with several of Nibras' concubines.

Feeling a mix of disgust and disappointment, Putnam left without saying a word. He returned to his room, hoping to clear his mind and forget what he had just witnessed. He took a bath, hoping the warm water would soothe his troubled thoughts. As he soaked, he tried to push the image of Jezkier's behavior out of his mind, but it lingered there, like a bad taste in his mouth.

While he was in the bath, Nibras eunuch, Phyre delivered a message from Jezkier inviting Towşan to join Putnam for some relaxation. Putnam shook his head in disbelief, realizing that Jezkier's priorities were not aligned with their mission. He knew he had to have a serious talk with the bard in the morning. Shortly after, the girl made her appearance, and although he didn't want to, neither did he want to hurt Towşan's feelings, as she was one of the newer concubines and felt somewhat displaced in the harem. So he invited her in to help him bathe and relax.

Towşan hesitated for a moment, but eventually stepped into the bathtub, blushing as she realized that Putnam was naked. However, she quickly regained her composure and began to help him wash his back. They did not speak the same language, and Putnam's Common Ofiri was only passable at times. As a result, there was a silence between them, but it was a pleasant one.

Towşan had an exotic look, with mixed traits that reminded Putnam in some way of Tubiel. She had fiery red hair and full lips that made his heart race. Putnam felt a strong attraction towards her but tried to push it aside, knowing that it was not the time or place for such thoughts.

As Towşan washed Putnam's back, he couldn't help but feel a sense of comfort in her presence. She had a gentle touch, and her scent was soothing. He began to relax, his mind clearing of all the worries that had been troubling him. In turn,

Towşan felt a sense of gratitude towards Putnam. She had been feeling out of place in Nibras' harem and had been struggling to adjust to her new surroundings. However, being invited to help Putnam relax had made her feel more welcome and included.

Putnam felt a sense of guilt for judging Jezkier too harshly. He realized that everyone coped with the stress of the mission in their own way, and maybe Jezkier needed some time to unwind. However, he still planned to have a talk with him in the morning to ensure that their priorities were aligned.

As Towşan finished helping Putnam bathe, he couldn't help but feel a sense of comfort in her presence. She had a gentle touch, and her scent was soothing. Despite the language barrier, they had formed a connection, and Putnam felt a kinship with her that he couldn't quite explain.

As they finished bathing, Putnam offered Towşan a towel and a smile, which she returned. Even though they couldn't communicate in words, they had managed to form a bond through their actions. What started as a simple gesture of comfort and relaxation quickly turned into a night of passion that left them both breathless. Their bodies spoke a language that was universal, and for that moment, the world outside didn't matter.

Putnam and Towşan explored each other's bodies with an intense fervor that left them both wanting more. Though they couldn't communicate in words, they didn't need to. Their connection was deeper than that, and they both felt a sense of comfort and belonging in each other's arms.

As Towşan left the room, Putnam laid back in the bath, feeling a sense of ease that he hadn't felt in a long time. He was grateful for the unexpected company, and for the reminder that even in the midst of chaos, there was still room for small moments of peace and connection and he hoped that Towşan felt the same way.

The Rescue of the Princess (August - December 1278)

“Listen here, Wadd. If you spit on me or make me fall off your hump, I will turn you into a rug so fast, you won’t know what hit you. Got it?”

—Putnam to his mount during his time in Ofir

The next day, after everyone recovered from the hangover left by the party, except for Putnam due to his witcher physiology, the mission began. They had breakfast and lunch at the palace before leaving in the afternoon, taking

advantage of the day for the court to make all the preparations. After breakfast, they attended a meeting with the Crown Spies where they were given a detailed map of Ofir, with key locations marked; these locations were sites where vague traces of the kidnappers' communications had been found, so that if they felt lost or did not find anything, they could go to the next area to investigate and not waste time, as well as information on the current state of affairs in the country.

The rescue mission would take about four months to carry out, from August to December, and would force Putnam, Jezkier, and Radeyah to travel through a large part of Ofir.

The plan was already made; they would start where the possible organization of mages had been leaving vague traces in their communications. Based on what they would investigate, they would advance until they found the witcher's half-sister (although neither Jezkier nor Putnam knew it at that time).

As they were told at the time, they were offered all kinds of help. The witcher was even granted a suit of armor from the School of the Scorpion, a very expensive relic, fully restored for him to wear during his journey. Although at first, Putnam refused, saying that he didn't need it and that what he already had was enough, in the end, he took it and wore it during most of the mission. Especially because, in its handling and weight, it was similar to his Griffin medium armor, and that made him feel more comfortable and safe when fighting, than with the light armor he brought from Zerrikania. The only problem was the heat it gave him, but he quickly adapted, although the first few days were hard. Luckily, they had enough water reserves until they reached the next city.

Jezkier was given a new set of clothes better than the simple ones he was wearing, they were made of light, breathable fabric, perfect for the hot climate, and featured intricate embroidery and designs that showcased his artistic flair. Though he was grateful for the gift, Jezkier was somewhat hesitant to wear them, because he liked to dress in a simple way to make his music stand out more.

After lunch, in the afternoon, when they were fully ready, the trio was taken to the courtyard where their transportation awaited them. Putnam had hoped to ride his beloved horse Odin, but the stablehand informed him that the journey through the different, intense climates of the country was too much for the old horse. Instead, they had provided them with a sturdy camel named Wadd.

Putnam sighed in resignation, knowing he wasn't used to riding a camel, but he had no other choice.

He stroked Odin's nose and whispered a few words, bidding him farewell before turning to Wadd, who was making strange noises, almost as if he were laughing at the witcher's discomfort. The trio mounted the camel, with Radeyah leading the way as their guide.

Visiting Bursa (late August 1278)

"Your musical knowledge never ceases to amaze me, Jezkier. You have truly saved the day."

—Putnam complimenting Jezkier after decoding the letter

The first stop for the trio was the city of Bursa, a coastal city located northwest of Ofir, which was the sister city of Manisa, known for its vibrant markets and picturesque seaside views. The winding streets were lined with colorful buildings, and the smell of exotic spices wafted through the air. The city was surrounded by lush green hills that stretched out towards the horizon, adding to the breathtaking scenery. Although not as spectacular as Manisa, it was equally beautiful.

The city was the site where a letter from the kidnappers had been intercepted by the spies of the satrap of the province. The satrap belonged to a noble family that had good relations with the Badawi since the time of Putnam's great grandfather i.e Nibras' grandfather. The satrap had been trying to solve the letter to help his friend for some time but had not succeeded.

Upon their arrival in Bursa, the trio's goal was to meet with the satrap's spies and try to solve the letter. However, they took approximately two days to do so because they needed time to recover from the early stages of the trip and adapt to their new surroundings. Especially Putnam and Jezkier, who had to deal with culture shock. Radeyah, on the other hand, was more so because she was not used to traveling so much in many ways, including animal transport, which she had not taken since her trip to the Northern Kingdoms in 1272, six years ago.

Despite being offered, through one of the spies, a place to stay in the palace of the satrap, they chose to stay in a luxurious inn called Altın Han (translated from ofiri : *Inn of the golds*), which was mainly intended for merchants and caravans. They did this to avoid arousing suspicion in case the kidnappers had spies. They did not want to compromise the safety of the governor by overstaying their

welcome.

After two days, one of rest and other for exploration of the city, the meeting with the satrap's spies happened. Also, during this brief period Radeyah took the time to teach the bard and the witcher about new customs.

During the reunion to decode the letter Jezkier noticed something peculiar. He recognized certain nordling musical patterns hidden within the code. With his help, they were able to decipher the letter and find a vague but somewhat more precise clue, which was already more than they had when they left Manisa that would lead them to the next destination, the city of Omeya, located on the other side of the Gulf of the Serpent.

However, Omeya was located across the treacherous gulf, which was known for its unpredictable weather . The gulf was named after a sea serpent / leviathan that was said to inhabit its depths, known as Tehom a creature that was believed to be so enormous that it could swallow various ships.

The trio knew that the journey would be perilous, and they needed to find a reliable ship and a skilled crew to navigate the treacherous waters. Radeyah took on the task of finding the ship that would take them to Omeya, a task that proved to be more challenging than she had anticipated. Many of the ships that sailed through the gulf were either too small or too poorly equipped, to make the journey to the distant city, in addition to taking routes that were too indirect, which would take them a few days, which they could have used more efficiently.

After several days of searching, Radeyah finally found a ship that seemed to be seaworthy and had a skilled crew. The captain of the ship, Simbad Al-Bahr Al-Kabir, also known as Simbad of the Great Sea, was a seasoned sailor who had crossed the Gulf of the Serpent many times before. He assured Radeyah that they would be able to make the journey safely.

With the ship secured, the trio spent several more days in Bursa, making preparations for the journey. Putnam took the opportunity to make some contracts and hunt different monsters to further prepare himself for what was to come and Jezkier spent his time playing music at the inn and gathering rumors and information that could prove useful on their journey taking advantage of the fact that most of the merchants and people of the caravans spoke several languages, among them, the Common Language of the Northern Kingdoms.

During those days, Putnam

faced a range of dangerous monsters. He battled a al karisi, a type of lower vampire, related to the alps and the bruxae, which had a particular taste for newborn babies. He also fought against a dybbuk, a hym-like spirit that was notorious for possessing humans and causing them to behave erratically. Another creature that Putnam encountered was the suhurmas, a creature related to the hippocampus, but far more aggressive in nature.

But perhaps the most dangerous creature that Putnam faced during his time in Bursa was the hedammu. This minor sea serpent was notorious for occasionally attacking ships in the harbor and its venomous bite could kill a man in seconds. Putnam managed to fend off the creature but not before sustaining several deep wounds. Which caused to delay a bit longer the departure. However, on the other hand, it allowed Radeyah and Putnam to get closer while the sorceress took care of him. She was not an expert healer, but she had improved her skills since 1273. From that point on, Radeyah began to try to manipulate him gradually. But the noble and charismatic witcher began to make an impression on her, and during the remainder of the journey, she changed her mind.

Finally, the day of departure arrived. The trio boarded the ship and set sail towards their next destination in their quest to rescue princess Nurshah.

Surviving the Gulf of the Serpent

The ship, captained by Simbad, after leaving Bursa, was expected to take about a week to cross the gulf. However, things quickly became more complicated than the trio had anticipated.

As the days passed, the weather in the Gulf of the Serpent began to change. The calm and welcoming sea that the trio had encountered at the beginning of their journey gradually gave way to an turbulence surge, which grew more and more intense each day.

Suddenly, one night without warning, the massive leviathan that gave its name to the gulf, Tehom, appeared and attacked the ship. Its enormous body slammed against the hull, sending everyone aboard tumbling. As the leviathan continued its assault, the ship was rocked violently from side to side, and the crew desperately tried to keep it afloat. Many fell into the sea and were devoured by other predators that had been attracted by the presence of the leviathan. Despite their efforts, the creature's immense strength proved too much for the ship to handle, and it began to break apart piece by piece, and just as the leviathan

came, it disappeared, once the ship was destroyed.

Radeyah, being a skilled sorceress, attempted to create a portal to escape, but it was too late. As she fell from the ship, she immediately realized the gravity of the situation. Different sea monsters viciously attacked her, and she had to cast spell after spell to defend herself. Finally, she got rid of them all. Just as she thought all was lost and she was the only survivor, she saw Putnam struggling in the distance, being dragged under by a horde of drowners.

Radeyah swam towards Putnam, fighting off the drowners with a powerful spell. But just as she was about to reach him, he was grabbed and pulled into the deep waters by more of them. She dived and managed to free him, but they were still surrounded, their oxygen running out quickly. With no other option left, Radeyah gave Putnam a kiss, passing air into his lungs and keeping him alive. Together, they fought their way through the swarm of drowners, using their skills to barely make it to a floating piece of wood.

Exhausted and gasping for breath, they lay on the makeshift raft, grateful for having survived. Radeyah and Putnam searched for Jezkier, hoping he too had survived. But he was nowhere to be seen. Initially, they had left Jezkier for dead, but to their amazement, the bard with the camel had also survived the ordeal, showing up on the shore the next day, both completely weary.

Using their hands and feet, they paddled towards the nearest shore that they seened, finally collapsing on the sand once they had reached it. As the sun rose the next morning, Radeyah woke up to the sound of seagulls and the smell of salt in the air. They had washed up on the shores of the city of Omeya, their intended destination. It was a miracle they had made it there alive, but they were there and they could continuing the rescue mission.

Exploring Omeya

After recovering from the incident, the group, along with

Wadd, continued their mission by exploring the city of Omeya, though they had slight suspicions that the leviathan attack may not have been natural. However, they had to put those suspicions aside due to everything that had happened.

They had literally lost almost everything. Except for a few things that had washed ashore and whatever they were wearing. In fact, Putnam had to take off the School of the Scorpion armor he was wearing so as not to sink the piece of wood

he and Radeyah climbed on and used as a makeshift raft, leaving Putnam with only his pants and witcher swords.

Fortunately, many coins from the ship's treasury, with which Sinbad paid the salaries of his employees , had washed ashore in Omeya, enough gold dinars to help them recover from the incident. It was truly a miracle of Destiny or the god of the Ofiris that they could recover so quickly from the shipwreck.

They bought supplies, new equipment, and looked for a place to stay. This time, they settled for a slightly less luxurious inn, but it was quite decent. The inn they found was not as grand as the one they stayed in Bursa, but it was still quite comfortable. The walls were adorned with tapestries depicting local legends, and the floors were made of polished wood, with plush carpets in some areas. The trio checked in and got settled into their respective rooms. One curious thing that happened, and which gradually began to forge the future romance between Radeyah and Putnam, beyond the events that had transpired, such as Radeyah's kiss that saved the witcher's life, was that the inn was almost full, and they had to share a room. This caught Jezkier's attention, and he began, for lack of a better word, shipping them and even getting inspired for new songs along the way. However, Putnam and Radeyah had to shut him up more than once due to the discomfort he caused them.

Putnam went to the market to look for new armor, but he couldn't find one as good as the School of the Scorpion armor he had lost. However, he did find a more stylish and elegant set that caught his eye. When he tried it on, he found it to be a bit uncomfortable, but it was better than nothing. He decided to buy it, hoping that it would provide him with some protection if they encountered any danger. Putnam, being a good friend, also bought Jezkier a local lute, the finest one he saw, as the bard had lost his in the shipwreck and had not been his usual self and was somewhat duller. Fortunately, the gift cheered him up and he was back to his usual self.

Meanwhile, Radeyah went to the market to buy new dresses since she had lost her previous ones due to the shipwreck, and the only dress she had left smelled like salt and algae. She found a skilled tailor who offered her a variety of dresses made of different materials, including silk, linen, and wool. After careful consideration, she decided to purchase three silk dresses.

Jezkier, on the other hand, took the opportunity to rest and relax in the common

room of the inn. He ordered some local delicacies and a cup of raki and sat back in a comfortable armchair, watching the other patrons. Like in Bursa, he was trying to gather information about the city and its inhabitants, hoping to find some clues that would help them in their quest.

After they had all finished their individual tasks, the trio met up in the common room to discuss their next move. They agreed on the following plan: Putnam, while doing contracts, would investigate and make inquiries to determine if there had been any recent magical activity in the area, in order to remove suspicion of the leviathan attack they had. Radeyah would visit the city's bajah to see if he had any information and would later join Putnam if he had not finished his part, and Jezkier would remain at the inn, continuing his efforts to gather information at the street level.

Putnam for his part discovered some disturbing information. While doing a contract against a desert banshee that terrorized the outskirts of the city that night, he had found out that the banshee had once been a Source in life, sacrificed for some unknown reason, possibly to manipulate a creature as large and powerful as the leviathan. This led him to suspect, almost confirm that the attack on the ship may have been intentional, and not just a random occurrence. Which meant that they were probably being watched, very closely.

On the other hand, Jezkier's efforts to gather information at the street level proved to be fruitless. He didn't find anything new or relevant, except for rumors of magical terrorist attacks that occurred almost two years ago. However, Radeyah had more luck with her visit to the city's bajah.

The bajah was willing to help in any way possible and was about to reveal some important information to Radeyah when he was suddenly killed. Radeyah confronted the assassin, but the assassin managed to escape through a portal, leaving Radeyah with only the information that in the city of Sova, they would find what they were looking for.

The trio reconvened in Putnam and Radeyah's room and shared their findings. Putnam's discovery added a new level of urgency to their mission. They realized that they were up against an unknown enemy who was willing to go to great lengths to achieve their goals and not simple mage kidnappers who only wanted power.

Luckily, Destiny had prepared the way for them, as the assassin had torn a piece

of fabric from the clothes he wore during his fight with Radeyah. After examining it carefully, they discovered that the clothing was of a type that was only manufactured in the city of Sova. This, coupled with the words of the deceased bajah, gave them an extra reason to go there.

Despite the setback with the bajah's murder, Radeyah's information provided them with a concrete lead. They knew that they had to head to the city of Sova and continue their investigation and rescue Nurshah, before it was too late and Ofir became doomed.

"Drums of War" (Mid-September 1278)

The journey to Sova took almost two weeks, primarily due to the city's location in the interior of the country, near the Great Dune Sea. Interestingly, it was the birthplace of Putnam's maternal clan, which shared the same name as the city and had to move to Manisa after losing much of their territory. Additionally, it was also the birthplace of his father, Nibras, during his grandfather's campaign to unify Ofir, which Nibras later completed. As a curious fact, Nibras acquired the nickname "*The Gale that Sweeps the Dunes*" because when he was born, a massive sandstorm hit the city and caused several of the largest dunes in the distance to disappear. This event made the oracles prophesied that in the future, Nibras would make the last independent remnants of Ofir disappear and bring them under his control.

Nibras' refusal to negotiate with the kidnappers had brought them to this point, and they needed to find Nurshah quickly. With her safe, Nibras could send in the Immortals and suppress any potential rebellions without jeopardizing his dynasty. (At that time, Putnam's identity as Nibras' son had not been confirmed, and being a witcher, he was infertile, so he did not count.)

Once they arrived, they realized why the bajah had told Radeyah that they would find what they were looking for there. The city, along with probably more territories, was already making moves to their independence, something that left Radeyah, annoyed and worried, for it meant that they were running out of time, and that if Nibras continued in his position of not negotiating, the threat of a conflict would be imminent. With the worries of Nibras for his kidnapped daughter, they had taken the opportunity to make that relatively public and started arming themselves for what looked like a bloody civil war. The nationalist fanaticism was noticeable in the streets.

The people of Sova were used to foreigners coming to their city, as it was located on the crossroads of several trading routes. However, they were wary of outsiders who seemed to be inquiring about sensitive matters related to the city's politics. Nevertheless, Putnam and his companions managed to blend in with the crowd and asked for the tailor's shop in a nonchalant manner.

The locals, eager to be of help to the travelers, readily gave them directions to the tailor's shop, showing them the fragment of clothing, after Putnam showed them the fragment of clothing, since Radeyah knew it was manufactured in the city, but not where. They assumed that the foreigners were working for the local bajah or his allies, who were known to be making preparations for the upcoming civil war. The people of Sova were proud of their city and were ready to fight for its independence, and they hoped that the bajah would be able to lead them to victory.

Putnam and his companions thanked the locals for their help and made their way to the tailor's shop. As they walked through the bustling streets of the city, they couldn't help but notice the atmosphere of tension and fear that hung over the people. The nationalist fanaticism that they had heard about earlier was visible in the way the locals talked and carried themselves.

Upon entering the tailor's shop, the group noticed that the tailor was shuffling about, packing up his belongings and closing up for the day. It was clear that he was in a hurry to leave. Putnam, however, stopped him, and Radeyah asked him if they could pass inside. Once inside the tailor's shop, Radeyah approached the tailor and asked him while showing it, about the piece of clothes that they have recovered from the assassin of the Omeya's bajah.

The tailor hesitated to reveal any information to them, his eyes darting nervously from one person to another. Radeyah, noticing his unease, calmly reassured him that they meant him no harm and that they were only seeking information. The tailor, however, remained hesitant and fearful, aware of the danger that revealing any information might pose to his family.

Putnam, growing impatient with the tailor's reluctance, threatened him with force, prompting the tailor to eventually confess that he couldn't tell them who he worked for. He explained that his family would be in grave danger if he were to reveal anything. However, he did mention that the mages of Nirfahnn and Mubahlai might have knowledge about the kidnappers. They were two splinter factions of the organization to which the kidnappers belonged, and they had

different ideologies about negotiating with Nibras to achieve their demands with respect to the organization from which they had split.

This information was significant as it confirmed the suspicions that the kidnappers were not just ordinary individuals who wanted political power with the independence of the satrapies, but rather mages who had a more complicated agenda. Radeyah knew firsthand that with mages, ambition consumed them almost always. The situation of Sova, the confrontation between Radeyah and the assassin in Omeya, Putnam's discovery regarding the origin of the Desert Banshee, and now the tailor's revelation, all pointed towards a bigger plot at work.

Once they left the tailor's store, they took the opportunity to prepare themselves, for it would be a long journey. Radeyah explained to Putnam and Jezkier that these two cities were further inland and she knew that time was against them, and although she could make a portal to shorten the time and arrive as soon as possible, this would endanger them and the mages they needed to find. Since they could be tracked more easily.

So they would have to prepare themselves for what would be a journey through one of the most dangerous areas of Ofir more than the Al-Harad Desert, the Great Dune Sea. They would also have to cross the Valley of the Nephilim, which was a less dangerous place than the Great Dune Sea, but dangerous nonetheless. They had to take this route because if they followed the usual trade routes, it was more than likely that they would be attacked more than once and they had to be at full strength when the time came.

To obtain more time for their long journey, estimated to take around three weeks or even a month, Radeyah decided to purchase the necessary materials to create a safe zone and a megascope. Although it wouldn't enable her to create a portal to instantly transport them and save time, it would allow her to contact Nibras once they reached the Great Dune Sea. So after leaving Sova, and they passed their first day in the desert, that night she used the megascope to contact Nibras and inform him of their progress. Radeyah requested to the malliq, that he stage a negotiation with the kidnappers to buy them some time, that they desperately, and Nibras agreed to follow Radeyah's plan. Radeyah also told him to prepared the army, so the malliq also began making arrangements with his elite troops, including the Immortals, to be ready for future rebellions.

Radeyah's plan had bought them some time, but the trio knew that they needed

to hurry to locate the splinter factions of the kidnappers' organization before the situation escalated.

Crossing the Great Dune Sea and beginning of the romance

The journey through the Great Dune Sea proved to be an odyssey, despite their preparations. In one word, it was exhausting, although they kept a good course thanks to Radeyah's astronomical knowledge. It was simultaneously beautiful, monotonous, and dangerous.

During the first week, they traversed the Sary Deňiz (the yellow sea), where the biggest threat they faced was the occasional gigascorpion and the heat. They had to make stops at the oases that appeared more regularly, due to the exhaustion they felt, as they approached the second large area of the Great Dune Sea, the Ak deňiz (the white sea), also known as the White Desert. The second week was much kinder to them, and during moments of peace and security at the oases, Putnam and Radeyah began to get more closer to each other.

Also, during this two weeks Radeyah took the opportunity to stay in touch with Nibras and learn more about the progress of the negotiations that were buying them time. However, communication started to fail once they reached the Black Desert probably due to the enormous distances.

The third week proved to be the hardest of all as they had to traverse the Gara Deňiz, also known as the Black Sea or the Black Desert, to reach the Valley of the Nephilim. Legends spoke of strange weather phenomena and terrible monsters for those who did not follow the proper routes, as was the case with our travelers. Once they were passing through, they verified what was true and what was not. For instance, the strange weather phenomena were indeed real, with black sandstorms that completely blocked the daylight, forcing them to take refuge in the nearest caves they could find. The monsters, on the other hand, were not what Putnam understood the term to mean due to his witcher profession. They were creatures that had evolved or mutated into dangerous predators to survive in that unforgiving environment, but Putnam and Radeyah were able to protect the group members, especially their mount Wadd and Jezkier, who were the weakest, without any problem.

As Putnam and Radeyah faced various challenges together while traveling through the Black Desert, their bond grew stronger. They battled fierce predators, like the nuak 'fuv, endured the treacherous weather, and navigated

the difficult terrain side by side. In these moments of hardship, they learned to rely on each other, their trust and respect for one another deepening with each passing day.

One evening, during a particularly intense sandstorm, they found themselves alone, away from the rest of the group, as Jezkier and the camel had wandered into the cave system they were that time, after the camel suddenly escaped (having found a source of water). Putnam was about to follow them, but Radeyah reassured him that they would be fine and that the animal was intelligent and would find their way back. As they sat huddled together, the tension between them became palpable. Putnam was drawn to Radeyah's beauty, the way her hair shimmered in the dim light, and the sparkle in her intelligent eyes.

Suddenly, without warning, their lips met, and they shared a passionate kiss. It was a moment of surrender, a release of pent-up emotions that had been building for weeks. As the night came, Jezkier returned from his "exploration" of the cave system with the camel Wadd. He was tired and eager to rest, but as he approached the camp where they have settled until the sandstorm and the night had passed. he heard noises that made him curious. When he looked inside, he saw Putnam and Radeyah in a compromising situation. He was about to shout in surprise when Radeyah cast a temporary spell on him and Wadd, rendering them both blind and deaf.

The next morning, when Jezkier regained his senses, he found himself lying next to Wadd, unsure of what had happened the night before. Meanwhile, Putnam and Radeyah pretended as if nothing had happened, but the memory of their encounter lingered between them, a secret that bound them even closer together. They continued their journey through the Great Dune Sea, stealing moments of intimacy whenever they could, especially away from the bard, as they didn't want him to know and start making songs about the two of them. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity they reached the Valley of the Nephilim. Gradually, they were arriving at their destination and accomplishing their mission, hopefully on time.

Venturing into the Valley of the Nephilim

After the almost deadly week, their arrival in the Valley of the Nephilim provided them with a

much-needed respite. The climate and environment, similar to that of a savannah but more humid, were much less hostile than the final part of the Great Dune Sea due to its closer proximity to the south of the country, which made it closer to the border with the exotic, humid, and tropical Zangvebar.

The Valley of the Nephilim was truly a wonder to behold. As they descended into the valley, Putnam and Jezkier were awestruck by the sight of the ancient ruins that dotted the landscape. The ofieris believed that this valley was the birthplace of the first civilization, the place where the gods and their offspring, the nephilim, had lived together.

They marveled at the sheer size and scale of the ruins. Enormous pillars rose up into the sky, their intricately carved surfaces telling stories of a long-forgotten past. The remains of great temples and palaces could be seen in the distance, their crumbling walls still standing as a testament to the grandeur of the civilization that had once inhabited this place.

The valley was also home to a rich and diverse ecosystem. Lush grasslands stretched out as far as the eye could see, teeming with all manner of wildlife. Herds of antelope and gazelle grazed peacefully, while packs of wolves and hyenas prowled in the shadows. The air was alive with the sounds of birdsong and the buzzing of insects, creating a symphony of life that was both beautiful and awe-inspiring.

As they continued to travel through the valley, spending about three days there, they were constantly in awe of the natural beauty and ancient ruins that surrounded them. However, their journey was not without danger. On the third day, just before they were due to arrive at their destination, the city of Nirfahn, they were suddenly confronted by an Aka Allghoi, a giant worm-like monster when they were passing near the last ruins of the valley

The creature was enormous, easily as long as three horses, with razor-sharp fangs. It rose up from beneath the ground, causing the earth to shake and sending the party tumbling to the ground. Putnam managed to grab his silver sword at the last moment, ready to fight. Although he did not know the monster, he decided to follow his instincts and also took Petri's Philter potion to increase the power of his Signs.

The battle was fierce, with the Aka Allghoi lashing out at the party with its four massive and snapping fangs. Putnam swung his silver swordt aiming for what he

think that were the creature's weak spots, using Signs like Aard to stun the monster briefly and use that instant to wound it. While Radeyah used powerful spells to weaken its electrical abilities that could pose a problem for Putnam. Jezkier and Wadd circled around the beast, trying to distract it and keep it from attacking their companions.

As the fight dragged on, the Aka Allghoi began to tire, its movements slowing as its wounds piled up. Finally, Putnam delivered the killing blow, plunging his sword deep into what would be considered the monster's brain.

As they gathered their scattered belongings, caused by the tremor from the appearance of the Aka Allghoi, and prepared to make their way to Nirfahn, Putnam felt the high toxicity aftereffects of the [Petri's Philter](#) potion, He could have used Swallow to eliminate the side effects, but he wanted to save the potion for an occasion that would require it more. His heart was racing, his mind was clouded, and he felt as if he had the strength to take on a whole army of Aka Allghois. Radeyah noticed his discomfort and offered to help. She led him to a nearby tree, to check him, where she sat him down. She knew that witches under the effects of a potion did not usually notice their wounds, and she did not want to lose him to one of them.

Jezkier, noticing Putnam's distress, began to play his lute and sang a soothing tune, hoping to calm the witcher's frazzled nerves. The soft melody, accompanied by the gentle rustling of the trees, gradually eased Putnam's racing heart, and his mind began to clear. He looked at Radeyah with gratitude for her healing touch, and at Jezkier with thanks for his friend's soothing music.

After two hours of rest, the group resumed their journey towards the city of Nirfahn. Putnam's body gradually returned to normal, and the effects of the potion began to wear off. He still felt a little dizzy and disoriented, but he was determined to push through it and arrive that night to the city.

Encounter with the sorcerers of Nirfahn

After almost a month, the trio arrived in Nirfahn, and Radeyah's plan to buy time had worked better than anticipated. They settled down in a shabby inn, far away from possible espionage, and contacted Nibras that same night using the megascope they had brought with them. Taking advantage of the city's megascope repeaters, they were able to reach Nibras from that distance. Nibras informed them that he had played the negotiations long enough to get the

kidnappers, who used a special type of megascope to distort their voice and face, to give him a vague location of where his daughter was. She was somewhere in the south of the country, so the trio was on the right track.

The atmosphere in Nirfahn was much like Sova, but calmer. Intervention from the aforementioned sorcerers they had gone looking for? Probably.

After spending a day in the city and catching up on what was going on, so as not to mess things up, as an alliance had to be forged most likely, the important task remained - finding the split mages that the tailor had told them about. Not knowing where to start, they got a permit and headed to the local magic academy. Nirfahn was one of the many Ofiris cities that had its own magic academy, inherited from its time as part of one of the independent kingdoms of the region.

Putnam was curious if he and Jezkier would be allowed to pass, despite having the permit, as they were non-mages. This concern arose from what was said about the magical academies of the Northern Kingdoms, Ban Ard and Aretuza. However, to the surprise of the witcher and the bard, they were let in without any problems.

The permission and the need to obtain it was done to avoid disturbing the mages and their students in any way during their investigations. Only those who had important information to share or those who had paid a significant sum of money, which would serve as funding, were allowed to attend.

In their case, it was the first thing After they mentioned their reasons due to Jezkier's unintentional slip of the tongue while practicing his ofiri with Putnam, they were granted permission without having to pay a single dinar. In fact, they were given a direct meeting with the ufendi of the school (the equivalent of their rector in the Northern Kingdoms). It was quite clear to the trio, although not confirmed, that they had found one of the splinter organizations, which was nothing more, and nothing less, than the school. On second thought, if the mages were behind the kidnapping, it made perfect sense.

Radeyah and Putnam chided him, mostly because of the danger of revealing information so lightly, but later thanked him. Thanks to him, the way was clear, and they were closer to rescuing Nurshah.

Once they were reunited with the ufendi, who had been informed of their purpose by his secretary, the trio was informed that the school was indeed the splinter organization they were looking for, and they were also told the reason

behind the kidnapping of the only heiress of the Badawi Dynasty.

The kidnapping of the princess was caused by Nibras' more centralist policies, as he desired a strong and powerful state to bequeath to his daughter instead of a confederation, as had been the case for some time during his reign. Additionally, the maliq wanted stricter regulation of magic, which led to the radicalization of mages. They allied themselves to form a union called Sehriylar Ittifoqi (The League of Mages) after the failure of a meeting between the ruler and various mage groups in Ofir. The League kidnapped Nurshah to negotiate with Nibras to maintain the status quo. However, as Nibras refused their demands, the situation escalated, and the League also demanded that several satrapies become independent. The Sehriylar Ittifoqi even gained support from various nobles, like Sova's Bajah for example, making their cause stronger.

In the case of the school, at the beginning they had allied with the other groups of mages for a very simple reason: the fear of being closed down and having all their investigations requisitioned or worse, destroyed. However, with the passage of time and the radicalization of several of the various groups that comprised it, the school had split from the League. They believed that they could reach an agreement peacefully with the maliq, which would benefit both the ruler of Ofir and the institution.

After hearing everything, the trio nodded, understanding the school's position. With no time to waste, they asked for an alliance. As much as they had a witcher and a skilled sorceress, they knew they were not enough to face a group of mages, and they needed help. They offered in return that Nibras would listen to them and would reach an agreement with them for sure.

They also asked the ufendi if he knew where Nurshah was being held captive, to which he replied no. The school had splintered shortly after the kidnapping. However, the mages of the city of Mubahlai, another splinter faction of The League, in the satrapy of Khalijan, knew where she was being held. The school agreed to the alliance, and they promised to support the trio in rescuing the princess once they knew her location. After the meeting, the trio stayed in the city for two days to prepare and contacted Nibras to update him on the situation. After that, they left for Khalijan ready to finally save Nurshah and to prevent, once and for all, a civil war from breaking out.

Discovering Khalijan, reaching Mubahlai and locating the Sehriylar Ittifoqi in the Silver Towers (Mid-November 1278)

Although they already had almost everything and could have chosen to go to Mubahlai using a portal, they did not want to screw it up at the last minute, and be tracked, assaulted, captured and executed by The League, so they continued traveling with the camel to reach the satrapy of Khalijan and its capital, Mubahlai.

It was a long journey, but it was shorter and much calmer than the previous one, taking about two weeks. Along the way, they helped some people who were passing through, and Putnam was able to take new contracts against exotic monsters. Fortunately, they were no longer in such a hurry, so they could afford to take extra time and avoid using the aforementioned portals, which were easily trackable, the random flying chests, or the disastrous flying carpets.

Finally, after that period, they reached the northern part of Khalijan, and soon after, its capital Mubahlai, in early to mid-November 1278. This time, they knew where to go, so they wasted no time, except for a day to make repairs and preparations for what would surely be an all-out assault. They deemed infiltration to be very difficult, even with reinforcements. After finishing their preparations, they headed to the only place in the city that had mages - their guild.

Upon arriving at the Mage Guild in Mubahlai, the trio was warmly welcomed, as the School of Nirfahn had already informed the guild of their arrival. They were taken to a meeting with the guild leader, a powerful mage named Tareq Fatma Cakir.

Tareq explained that the guild had joined the League for a similar reason as the School of Nirfahn initially, but in their case, it was more religious than political, as the use of magic was an essential part of their religious practices. They feared that with Nibras' centralization policy, he would impose a single religion and forbid not only their beliefs but also the use of magic to priests under that one religion. The members of the guild were mages, but they were also very close to priests. They were considered a hybrid between the two, known as büyürähips by the locals. They believed that the use of magic, employed for the common good, was a gift that God gave to some humans to help and guide the rest towards enlightenment and communion with him. That was the reason they would never use it to harm anyone. So, after the radicalization of several of the groups that made up the League, they were forced to abandon this alliance, as it went against their values.

Radeyah, Jezkier, and Putnam listened to Tareq, and Radeyah, acting as Nibras' representative, offered them a deal. Nibras would never ban their religion in exchange for their help in recovering his kidnapped daughter. Tareq was intrigued by Radeyah's offer, and after a few moments of silence, he nodded in agreement. He was relieved that they could finally do something to protect their religious practices. Tareq offered his full support to the trio and promised to help them in any way possible.

Tareq then offered his help in the only way his beliefs allowed him to, by providing them with money taken from the guild's emergency reserves and revealing the location of where Nurshah was being held captive: the Silver Towers, a ruin located in the savannah, closest to the humid, tropical jungle that was so common in the neighboring country of Zangvebar.

The trio left the meeting with a bittersweet feeling. On one hand, they had obtained the location of the captive princess, but on the other hand, they had hoped for a direct support of the guild, which they did not receive. Nevertheless, they couldn't complain, as they still had the significant support of the school.

That same night, after having dinner in a more luxurious place as a way of celebrating, just in case they ended up dying in the Silver Towers, they contacted Nibras to inform him of their progress. Nibras was pleased with their report and offered to send Kalesti as reinforcement, despite the risk of using portals due to the aforementioned traceability. The trio accepted Nibras' offer, as they were already expecting to have to fight their way through, so it didn't matter if the enemy was prepared or not. They believed that having Kalesti's assistance would make the task a little easier specially because of his mastery in illusions.

And lastly, before going to sleep, they contacted the mages of the School of Nirfahn to inform them of Nurshah's location, as they had agreed. After learning of her location, the mages fulfilled their part of the agreement and said they would send people to join the rescue the next day. The trio bid farewell to the *ufendi*, telling him that the people he was sending to help should gather in the city square, as that was where they had agreed to meet with other allies, namely Kalesti.

The Battle of the Silver Towers and the Rescue of Princess Nurshah (December 1278)

“*Nurşah, sen şimdi güvendesin. Seni buradan alıp ailennin yanına götürüreceğim*”
—Putnam to Princess Nurshah as she was liberated

The next day, the trio met Kalesti in the square and, shortly after, they met with

the mages sent by the school: Femi Olusola, Amira Saleh, Saa Abasi, Amina Adila, Faridah Nour, Henuka Khonsu and Hassan al-Turabi. Once they had gathered, they went to a residence in the city that Kalesti had from his time as an advisor to the satrap of Khalijan. There they would plan the assault under suitable conditions.

Everyone knew where the aforementioned Silver Towers were, as they were very famous ruins. Ofir was full of such ruins, and it had many belonging to legendary times. What they did not expect was that the kidnappers had been there all the time.

Although they were all skilled sorcerers, they could not afford to improvise, no matter how rough they were. They also had to plan the rescue, which Putnam would take care of with Radeyah watching his back. Jezkier, on the other hand, didn't have much to do in the assault, except to serve as a distraction if he wanted to, which, despite the risk and Putnam's concern for his safety, he agreed to.

The group spent several days planning the assault on the Silver Towers. Mainly, because they discovered that the ruins had been protected with magic, so that they could not be properly visualized by a mage using remote viewing. So, they had to resort to getting outdated maps of the ruins made by local archaeologists. They carefully studied the layout of the ruins, analyzing the possible entrances, exits, and any potential traps or ambushes that the kidnappers might have set up. They also discussed the best approach to take, considering the terrain and the surrounding savannah.

Putnam suggested that they split into two groups, with one group creating a diversion while the other sneaked into the towers and rescued Nurshah. Jezkier volunteered to be part of the distraction group, and the mages agreed. They also agreed that in case the distraction was short-lived but successful, that group, or at least a part of it, would check the other tower. This would save them time in finding Nurshah or serve as an attack force, whichever they considered best.

Radeyah and Putnam would lead the rescue group, along Kalesti and half of the mages. They knew it was very likely that they would be discovered and there would be confrontations, but they agreed that they would use non-lethal force if possible. This was not to avoid any unnecessary casualties, but rather so that Nibras could judge the mage kidnappers for their actions.

After several days of planning, which took about a week and a half, they had a

detailed plan in place. Putnam also took advantage of this time to tune up his equipment and his armor by spending Taneq's money. He obtained another rare armor from the School of the Scorpion, which he was able to incorporate runes into because the city's blacksmith was also a runewright.

Once the plan was ready and everyone was prepared, they set out for the Silver Towers on foot instead of using portals or other means of transportation. They traveled for four days and waited until nightfall when they reached the ruins to make their move. They used the cover of darkness to conceal their approach, also taking advantage of the natural cover provided by the savannah.

As they approached the Silver Towers under the cover of darkness, they split into their pre-planned groups. Radeyah and Putnam led the rescue group composed also by Amirah Saleh and Saa Abasi, sneaking into the towers. Meanwhile, Jezkier led the distraction group.

The plan was simple: the mages would cover his back and help him act as bait. The bard appeared alone in front of the towers and took the opportunity to sing songs. The volume was modified through a spell to be louder, thanks to the help of the mages belonging to this group. This caused some kidnappers to come out, and after taking him for a madman and asking him to stop singing, they ended up attacking him. Then, it was discovered that the bard had been an illusion, and that in reality, he was not in that area but in a safer one. This pleased Putnam, who watched the scene from one of the windows of the tower and was still worried about his friend's safety. After that, taking advantage of the moment of confusion, the mages who were part of the distraction group came out of their hiding places and engaged in a duel against the kidnappers who had come out, causing their forces to go down. There were casualties on both sides, although fortunately, there were not many, and some of the kidnappers were arrested.

The noise caused by the battle alerted the mages in both towers, causing many of them to come out and confront the distraction group. The group was able to handle them more or less well, although many ended up quite wounded. Nonetheless, they managed to survive, which allowed the rescue party to be more successful due to the reduced number of personnel, whether they were mages or not, that they would have to face.

As the rescue party moved deeper into the tower, the air grew thick with tension. The group knew that they were getting closer to their target, but they also knew

that the kidnappers would not give up the princess without a fight. The group remained on high alert, their senses attuned to any sound or movement that could signal an attack.

After they entered a new section of the tower, searching for the room where Putnam had heard the cry of the little girl after using the Supirre Sign, one of the mages who were guarding the princess launched a sudden blast of magic, knocking Putnam's griffin steel sword out of his hand, destroying it, and injuring his right arm. The mage, along with several other guards, including other mages and also Special Immortals, retired veterans of different conflicts dissatisfied with the treatment Nibras had given them, and who were hired and later modified by these sorcerers, advanced towards the group, ready to fight.

Despite being caught off guard, the rescue party quickly sprang into action, taking up defensive positions and preparing for battle. Putnam, who relied on his witcher Signs and silver sword, joined the fray alongside the four mages, although he had to alternate very quickly between using the Signs and the sword due to the injury to his right arm.

The battle was intense, with the mages attacking with a flurry of spells, while the rescue party dodged and countered with their own attacks. Despite being outnumbered, the group refused to back down and their coordinated efforts allowed them to gradually gain the upper hand.

Putnam for his part took on the Immortals, barely defeating them, and tried to keep them all alive to be judged. However, he ultimately had to act out of self-defense. After the battle against the elite soldiers, he attempted to assist the mages who were still fighting, but his injuries prevented him from doing so effectively. Therefore, he was sent to rescue the princess and extract her from wherever she was being held.

As Putnam made his way through the tower, he could hear the sounds of battle echoing all around him. The boom of spells being cast reverberated through the stone walls, and he couldn't help but wonder if he was going to be able to rescue the princess before it was too late. With his witcher senses he was able to navigate the tower's labyrinthine corridors and avoid any potential ambushes. As he approached the room where the princess was believed to be held, he could hear the mages' spells growing louder and more frantic.

Once he reached the room's door, he used his silver sword to slice through the enchanted locks and barriers and finally managed to reach the princess. The

sight that greeted him was horrific – the princess was chained to the wall, her face bruised and battered from the mages' cruel treatment as if she had been about to be killed, and they had been having fun with her before that.

Without hesitation, Putnam rushed forward, breaking the chains that held the princess captive. She collapsed into his arms, weak and exhausted from her ordeal. He quickly gathered her up and began to make his way back through the tower, taking care to avoid the battle, while he himself tried not to faint from his injuries and fatigue.

Putnam's heart was pounding as he carried the princess down the narrow, winding stairs of the tower. His breath came in ragged gasps, and his vision blurred as he struggled to stay conscious. He knew that he had to get the princess to safety, no matter the cost.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Putnam emerged from the tower, carrying the princess in his arms. The mages that were outside, along with Jezkier let out a cheer as they saw the pair, and quickly surrounded them, providing cover as they made their way back to a portal that would take them to Ofir's capital. Despite his best efforts, Putnam could feel himself slipping, his strength waning as he fought to keep moving. He stumbled once, then twice, before finally collapsing in a heap on the ground. The princess was safe, and that was all that mattered.

Return to Manisa and life with Radeyah / Miscellaneous Contracts (December 1278 - January 1279)

By the time the witcher woke up, due to the heavy rain, two days had passed, and he found himself in the infirmary of the Winter Palace of Nibras. The first face he saw was that of Towşan, who greeted him with a smile. She had been sent to take care of him and watch over him while he recovered from his wounds. Putnam was glad to see her after so long and was pleased to see that she seemed happier and better integrated than when they first met.

After that moment of joy, Putnam could not resist asking Towşan about Nurshah, speaking in a better ofiri than when they first met. She kindly told him that, at the last moment, one of the mages had grabbed the princess when Putnam fell to the ground. Fortunately, nothing had happened to her, and she was safe and wished to meet her savior better.

It is worth noting that

the winter in northern

Ofir differed significantly from that of the Northern Kingdoms. Its closest counterpart would be the winter of Lyria, albeit much warmer, characterized by heavy rains, occasional snow, and temperatures ranging from three to eleven degrees Celsius. The palace used during this season was specially designed to withstand flooding.

After a few days of recovery, Putnam was discharged from the infirmary and reunited with his companions, Jezkier and Radeyah, later with Nibras. They celebrated his heroic rescue of Princess Nurshah with a grand feast, complete with music and dancing. During the celebration, Nibras presented Putnam with a gift – an Ofiri steel Witcher Sword of the extinct School of the Scorpion called Zulfiqar fully restored. Putnam was humbled by the gift, as he had lost his Griffin steel sword in the towers. He thanked Nibras and promised to use the new sword with honor and respect. This steel saber, he would carry it for the rest of his life, until his death in 1555, being also buried with the sword. Nibras also gave him the title of "*Ofiriň Milli Gahrymany*" (Ofir's National Hero) and made his name known throughout the country including embassies.

After the festivities, Putnam felt restless and expressed his desire to return to the North. However, Jezkier convinced him to stay, using the argument that he had everything a witcher could want in Ofir - fame, glory, contracts, respect, and a beautiful sorceress who desired him. Jezkier also reminded Putnam of the good monetary reward he had received, which could provide him with a comfortable living for several years if he didn't wanted to work.

Despite this, Putnam couldn't help but think of Tubiel and their conversations. He missed her, and wondered what she was doing at that moment. However, Jezkier used the argument that returning to the Northern Kingdoms would only lead to a life of poverty and discrimination due to his mutant status, emphasizing that Ofir was the place where he belonged.

Ultimately, Putnam decided to listen to Jezkier and stay in Ofir, realizing that he had found a place where he was respected and valued. He saw the wisdom in Jezkier's argument that in Ofir, he had everything a witcher could want. He began to embrace his life in Ofir, moving shortly thereafter to Radeyah's house, although at least that month they still did not clarify whether they were dating or not, and continued to work as a witcher, honing his skills and facing new challenges, all while enjoying the warmth and hospitality of the people of the country.

During this short but intense period, Putnam remained mostly in the capital, taking on numerous contracts either in the city or nearby. One notable case involved assisting sixty men in opening the ruins of a cave that was rumored to be full of riches, only to discover that it was filled with wyvern excrement. Another case involved saving the son of the bajah of Manisa, with the help of Kalesti, from marrying a bruxa named Nadilla, revealing a conspiracy of vampires who wanted to take control of the city. Additionally, there was a time when he went to help a poor boy seduce the daughter of a satrap who had come to the city, but ended up facing a disaster with a Djinn after the boy rubbed a lamp containing the genie and he revealed that was actually the exiled son of the satrap seeking revenge against his father and sister. Among many others, that the witcher experienced in that period of his life.

But all was not perfect, for a storm was approaching on the horizon, a storm that would change the witcher's life forever, but that, is a story for another day.

The request from Zangvebar and parting ways with Jezkier (Mid- January 1279)

"Titles or glory don't make anyone great or happy, boy. Look at the knights; do you see them happy? Underneath their armor, they're just frustrated men trying to make a mark in the world. And the higher they climb, the further they have to fall. So don't pursue that things, pursue purpose. Find something that makes you feel alive, something that gives you meaning, something worth fighting for. It can be something like our profession or as simple as being a good father. Look at Raven or Geralt of Rivia. What are they now that they are dead? Just names in stories, nothing more. So don't waste your life chasing hollow accomplishments. That's how you leave a mark on the world that will never be forgotten."

—Keldar to Putnam, 1269

As already mentioned, life for the witcher that month was ideal, in almost every way. Sooner than later, the work distracted him enough and he stopped thinking about Tubiel, and therefore, missing her, to that, he added certain pleasures that could be considered "hedonistic", which at first he rejected, but sooner rather than later, he ended up enjoying. In short, his life was a dream for someone of his profession.

But every dream must come to an end, and sooner rather than later, the same pleasures that he enjoyed gave way to emptiness, and that emptiness gave rise to a longing for something more that the country of the Far South could not

provide him with, but he either did not know or did not want to know what it was.

So, one day that month, when he returned from spending time with Nurshah, as he enjoyed regaling the young princess with stories of his contracts and adventures, a diplomat from Zangvebar arrived at the Royal Winter Palace seeking help. No one in his country had been able to put an end to the "terrible being" that was causing a series of mass murders, not even the [Paladins of the Zang](#) or the witches of the [School of the Lion](#). So Putnam decided to offer his assistance to find out what it was and eliminate the threat once and for all.

After that, he went after Jezkier, ready to drag him into an adventure, just as the bard had indirectly dragged him to rescue the princess of Ofir in order to save his life in Zerrikania. But then, the unexpected happened, breaking what [D'yaeb!](#) would call in the near future the "*fragile ego of a knight in white armor*" of the witcher, leaving him devastated, as much as his crucifixion had done physically in the land of the dragon worshippers.

And that was that the bard refused to go with him, not because he was tired or afraid or any other similar reason, but out of selfishness - as simple as that - since he had already achieved what he had wanted: fame and glory. He was known by a whole country, showered with women, dinars, good wine and gigs. And although he appreciated the witcher, he didn't need him anymore. They had both gotten what they wanted, and that was the end of the story.

Actually, the bard didn't think all that, or at least not in that way. He was simply drunk with power from all that they had been through and what they had achieved. So he would eventually regret it and try to redeem himself, but that's a story for another time.

This, as was normal for someone like Putnam, felt like a kick in the balls. The witcher and the bard had a heated discussion, in which Putnam called him every name in the book before storming out. He felt not only cheated, but also disappointed, sad, and deep down, alone. Despite all the luxuries he had, he had lost his only point of connection to the land he had grown up in, and thus, all the people he cherished.

With Radeyah, it was different. The sorceress, who had returned to her position as Crown Sorceress, understood. And Nibras, though he showed concern for Putnam, as he increasingly suspected that he was her lost son, did as well. But still, he supported him in his decision, as it would be a way to exercise soft power

and gain better relations with the neighboring country by sending their "hero" to help them.

The only thing they explicitly asked him to do was to return safely and as soon as possible, to which Putnam promised to try. After that, he took one of Zangvebar's commercial ships together with the diplomat and left for the mysterious border country, which had generated so many myths among the Nordlings.

Encountering Xirnedh II

The journey to Zangvebar aboard a long-distance Zangvebarian

Commercial Dhow was smooth. Thanks to the favorable winds and the expertise of the Zangvebarian sailors, the journey was relatively short and only took a few days to reach the country, specifically the coastal city of Menutias.

Putnam was impressed by both the city, which was one of the most "humble", and its people. Although he had met Zangvebarians in the coastal kingdoms of the Northern Kingdoms, such as in Kerack, and more recently the diplomat named Kifeda, who seemed a kind and wise man, the Nilfgaardian and Nordling propaganda (especially the Nilfgaardian) and his bittersweet experience in Melukka, and the bad Zerrikania experience, as well as the contract to free Prince Guiscard from his werehyena curse, had led him to believe that they would be as barbaric as the Gemmerians. He thought he would just go there to kill the monster (or whatever it really was), get paid and leave, but that was not the case. In fact, they seemed to be a very civilized and hard-working people.

Menutias even reminded him of Lan Exeter in a way, although vaguely. That made him feel much more at ease after arriving. The only thing that really bothered him was that they tried to take his money all the time by offering him all kinds of products, but he supposed that was typical of them with anyone, foreigner, or local. It was something similar to what they did in the North when they went to trade, but more exaggerated. Anyway, the Koviri traders, on many occasions, were a thousand times worse. Although they did not stay for long, since they had to meet with the king to learn more about the being, the reward, and whether he had any help to eliminate it, Putnam was pleased that the city gave him such good vibes from the moment he set foot in it. It made him change his mind quickly about those people.

This made him realize that the world was more complex and complicated than

he had known before, but also beautiful, and that he had to learn to enjoy it in all its forms despite the bad things. It was a lesson he would later unlearn the following year, but gradually, over time, he would recover it, and it would give him some of the peace he so desperately needed.

They were to stay in the city for two days, a procedure to which Putnam was already accustomed from his past experiences in the neighboring country: one day for Kifeda to explain things to him and help ease the culture shock, and another day to prepare not only for his visit with the king, but also for his contract and whatever dangers the country had in store for him. Kifeda even got him an old bestiary from the time of the [Aen Nílf](#)e colonization, written in the Late Ellyon Dialect, which served the witcher more or less (since he understood Ellyon, having studied it) to get "up to date" on what could be waiting for him in that land. This made him feel, as in Melukka, an increased subconscious spirit of exploration and curiosity to know more about the world, reaching at that time the point that he would had during his travels with Fabio.

But unfortunately, their time together would be short because on the night of the second day, something terrible happened while the diplomat and the witcher were resting at the local inn where they had settled. The aforementioned "being" that plagued Zangvebar with his mass murders attacked again, making Kifeda one of its victims.

The situation was extremely tense and dangerous for Putnam. He had lost his only guide and translator in a land where he was a complete outsider. His foreign appearance made him stand out, and suspicions arose in the conservative population of Menutias. This was exacerbated by the fact that this city had been one of the many victims of the notorious Skelliger pirate Yustianna and her crew, who had sacked Zangvebar and Ofir six decades ago. It was a deeply ingrained grudge that still persisted in the minds of the people.

Putnam's reputation as the hero of the neighboring country and his status as a witcher did little to assuage the locals' suspicions. They quickly began to blame him for the recent massacre and turned against him. The situation rapidly deteriorated, and Putnam found himself the target of stones and the Paladins' drawn swords.

As a foreigner who did not understand the language or the customs of the land, Putnam was lost and confused. He did not know what to do or say to dispel the

mounting anger and hostility against him. It seemed like he was doomed to suffer the same fate as Kifeda.

But then, just as things seemed at their worst, Xirdnedh Jr, a bard who was quite famous in the country, stepped in and spoke up for Putnam. He claimed to have seen the real murderer after finished his performance and declared that it was not the witcher. His intervention was a game-changer, and it saved Putnam's life.

Thanks to Xirdnedh Jr's bravery and quick thinking, Putnam managed to escape from that dangerous situation. He was deeply grateful to the bard and knew that he had a debt of honor to repay and he was relieved to find that he spoke Nordling Common Language fluently, which was a stroke of luck. Xirdneh was of mixed race, with his mother being a half-elf, and had spent part of his life in the Northern Kingdoms, which explained why he spoke the language so well.

Despite being a quadroon, which was not well regarded by the Zangvebarians due to the brutal colonialist past of the Aen Nílfe, they overlooked it due to his highly esteemed music. Putnam quickly noticed that due bard's distinctive orange eyes. However, Xirnedh Jr, refused any form of payment, believing that it was an injustice that needed to be remedied. He argued that people should leave the past behind, learn from it, and move on instead of holding onto it, as this could create the possibility of history repeating itself. After their eventful encounter, the bard asked what a **Megni Mchawi** (translated as foreign witcher) was doing in the country. Xirdnedh Jr supposed that Putnam was there because of the being that was causing mass murders, and Putnam confirmed this, explaining that Kifeda was his guide and translator, and that they were planning to leave the next day to meet with the king. However, now that Kifeda was no longer an option, Putnam was unsure of what to do. Xirdnedh Jr then kindly offered to be his guide and translator.

After offering his help, Xirdnedh Jr explained that he knew the terrain and the people of the region like the back of his hand. He had been traveling for some time and had learned many things about the land of his father. The bard explained that he had been traveling and playing music for many years, and that he had become well acquainted with the various languages and customs of the region. He was confident that he could act as a competent guide and translator for Putnam. For a moment, Putnam was unsure, remembering Jezkier's betrayal. He wondered if Xirnedh Jr would take advantage of him as well. However, he eventually agreed to the bard's offer, not only because of his current situation but also due to Xirnedh's wise words about leaving the past behind while

learning its lessons.

Once Putnam agreed, Xirdnedh Jr suggested that they leave early the next morning since the journey to the capital, Zagwe, was a long one, and the jungles were less dangerous during the day. Putnam agreed, and they made arrangements to meet at dawn outside the inn where they had first met. Xirnedh Jr reassured Putnam that he need not worry if he needed anything before they left since the businesses in the city would be open very early in honor of Oba, as it was her day, and he could prepare himself before leaving.

Confrontation with the Kasai Rex

“It’s quite amusing, really. You remind me so much of one of my exes, Dragonfly. She too had a penchant for trying to take a bite out of me. Of course, she was a bit more charming than you, but I suppose you have your own... unique way of expressing yourself.”

—Putnam during his fight against the **Kasai Rex**

The following day, after having a breakfast of Doro Wat, coffee, and anjero, which were traditional meals for the day of Oba, they then acquired a zorse named Ala as their mount for the journey. The bard took the reins, as the animal had quickly taken a liking to him. Zorses were known to be very selective about who they became fond of, but Ala seemed to have taken an instant liking to the bard. Putnam, on the other hand, would take longer to win the animal's affection, though he would eventually do so.

The witcher and the bard departed at dawn, making the most of the remaining moments before sunrise to ensure that Putnam had everything he needed for the journey. Putnam acquired new armor of a hybrid design, incorporating both local and Nilfgaardian elements, as well as the necessary ingredients for his potions. This proved to be the most expensive part of their preparations, not only because the items were imported but also because they were not new from the North. Xirdnedh Jr generously bore the expenses himself, doing his new friend a favor. Once the journey began, Xirnedh Jr shared more information about the country, expanding on the knowledge that the deceased Kifeda had originally given Putnam, in preparation for his visit to the capital and his meeting with the king.

Their objective was to reach the heart of the country, where the capital was situated. The placement of the capital was symbolic, as there were no rivers nearby, and water had to be diverted. Nevertheless, it represented the

unification of all the tribes under one government. This was a common social goal shared by the Zangvebarians and the Ofiris. However, the Zangvebarians had achieved it much earlier due to their struggles with the oppressive regime of Aen Nílfe.

Luckily, the journey took considerably less time than Xirdnedh Jr had estimated, thanks to the merchant riverships and chariots they encountered along the way. These not only helped them but also saved them a lot of time. However, their journey was not without its challenges, as something was watching the bard and the witcher from the shadows. Eventually, Putnam had to face his first local monster, which challenged his skills as a witcher.

This monster, which Putnam later named Kasai Rex using Nilgaardian standards for naming powerful creatures, was a Kasai that the bard and the witcher encountered on their journey to the city of Zeila, a few days before reaching the capital city of Zagwe. The Kasai Rex was a massive lizard with a predominantly red body, adorned with yellow and green tones and spikes that protruded from its body. Its appearance was reminiscent of the reconstructed T-Rex discovered during excavations in Nazair by arqueologists like Istredd, but with certain similarities to a cockatrice.

As Putnam's medallion vibrated intensely, the witcher realized that a monster had already locked onto them and lunged forward to attack, which he quickly recognized from the Aen Nílfe bestiary he had read on his first day in the country, a Kasai. Reacting quickly, Putnam drew his silver sword and latched a silver chain onto the creature, drinking a potion to boost his abilities. Despite his efforts, the Kasai's skin proved to be impenetrable, and none of Putnam's Signs seemed to have any effect on it. It was as if the monster had been modified or possessed in some way.

With no chance of defeating the beast, the bard and the witcher made the difficult decision to flee for their lives. They ran their mount as fast as they could until they stumbled upon a ravine. With the Kasai Rex closing in on them, they realized that they had no other options. In a reckless and suicidal fashion, Putnam, the bard, and their mount leaped across the ravine. The jump was harrowing, and it seemed like they were doomed to fall into the depths below. But by some miracle, they made it to the other side, landing on the rocky ground with a thud. They breathed a sigh of relief, grateful that they had escaped the terrifying and impossible-to-defeat monster. As they caught their breath, they

looked back at the ravine and saw that the Kasai Rex had failed to make the jump and had plummeted to its death.

As bard, witcher and mount rested, Putnam tried to make sense of what they had just encountered, according to what Kifeda had told him, updating the ancient bestiary he had given him and also Xirdnedh Jr seem to agree with that statement. The Kasai Rex was a monster that had long been believed to be extinct by the witchers of the School of the Lion and Paladins of the Zang. And yet, there they were, face-to-face with a creature that was not only alive but also nearly invulnerable. Putnam couldn't help but wonder if there was a connection between the Kasai Rex and the being that was responsible for the recent mass murders in the country.

At first, it seemed unlikely. But as he had learned in Ofir with the Desert Banshee, one should never rule out anything. The possibility of the Kasai Rex being somehow related to the mysterious being was still on the table, and Putnam knew that they would have to stay vigilant and continue their investigation.

After their encounter with the Kasai Rex, the bard and the witcher continued their journey and made a stop in Zeila, a bustling city situated in the heart of a valley surrounded by jagged mountains. The city's walls were built of sturdy stone, encircling the city like a protective embrace. The streets were narrow and winding, flanked by tall, mud-brick buildings with thatched roofs. Small shops and stalls lined the streets, selling everything from products brought from the Apumayu Basin to handmade jewelry and pottery, as the city was part of an important commercial route. The bustling atmosphere of Zeila was a stark contrast to the desolate wilderness in which they had spent so many days and nights.

Upon seeing the bard and the witcher's disheveled appearance, especially Putnam's, the curious locals asked what had happened. It was unusual for visitors to come in such a state, or to come at all, as the area had been plagued by the Kasai Rex for some time, and no one had been able to kill it. Upon being asked about their disheveled appearance, Xirdnedh Jr explained that they had successfully killed the Kasai Rex by jumping over a ravine. After hearing that, the locals shared that the ravine was of artificial origin, designed as a trap by their caplata (a vague equivalent to a witch / druid in the Northen Kingdoms), who had been commissioned by the barnegus of the city to put an end to the monster's rampage. They were thrilled to learn that the trap had finally worked and the Kasai Rex was no longer a threat to their city. In a gesture of gratitude,

they generously rewarded the bard and witcher with several shilingi to make up for any trouble they might have faced.

After their successful mission, the bard and the witcher spent a few days in Zeila, taking time to rest and replenish their supplies before resuming their journey. Energized and ready for what lay ahead, they set off once again, heading towards the capital of Zangvebar.

Meeting with the negus Badru XXI (Early February 1279)

“You're quite the ladies' man, aren't you, Putnam? First the sorceress, now the princess. Maybe you should add 'charming smiles' to your list of witcher skills.”

—Xirdnedh Jr to Putnam after the reunion with the Negus of Zangvebar

After vanquishing the Kasai, the bard and witcher continued their journey through the vast landscapes of Zangvebar, finally arriving at the gates of Zagwe, the capital of the kingdom. As they made their way through the bustling streets, Putnam and Xirdnedh Jr couldn't help but marvel at the city's spectacular architecture, which was a true testament to the ingenuity and creativity of the people.

The city was a melting pot of different cultural influences, each one blending seamlessly with the next to create a unique and harmonious fusion of styles. The winding alleys and streets were lined with buildings of all shapes and sizes, each one more beautiful than the last. The colorful facades of the buildings were adorned with intricate carvings and designs, depicting scenes from ancient legends and tales.

But it was the x-shaped temples that truly captured their attention. Partially submerged underground, these ancient structures were a sight to behold. The witcher couldn't help but feel a sense of awe as he gazed upon them, wondering about the people who had built them so long ago and the stories they held within.

As they made their way towards the royal palace, they were greeted with the sight of an immense structure that was truly breathtaking. The palace was a grand testament to the power and wealth of the kingdom, with its towering spires and ornate details. The bard and the witcher couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement as they made their way inside, eager to finally, have the reunion with the negus of the country.

Fortunately, they didn't wait for the meeting too long, as the witcher's reputation preceded him. Upon their arrival at the royal palace, they immediately recognized him as the hero who had rescued Princess Nurshah of Ofir, a feat that had gained him widespread notoriety, particularly among the Zangvebarian nobility. In addition, the court was informed of his unique physical appearance as soon as he agreed to help. Putnam's striking heterochromatic eyes were a distinguishing feature that made him easily identifiable, and thus it could be said that the court knew him both by reputation and appearance.

As they stepped through
the grand palace gates, a
lively courtyard greeted them, bustling with servants, soldiers, and nobles from
every corner of the kingdom. Excitement and anticipation filled the court as the
duo made their way into the throne room, where the negus sat on his grand
throne, flanked by his advisors representing each province.

As the bard and witcher strode towards the throne, the bustling courtiers fell silent, their attention immediately captured by the duo. The Negus fixed his eyes on them, observing their every move with a measured gaze, taking special interest in the witcher's appearance. It was clear that the Negus had already heard of Putnam's remarkable feats and was eager to see the celebrated witcher of the neighboring country in the flesh. The hushed atmosphere was palpable, as everyone waited in anticipation for the proceedings to unfold.

Xirdnedh appeared visibly nervous, while
Putnam took in every detail of the palace
with awe. The grandeur and beauty of the place surpassed any palace he had
ever visited in the Northern Kingdoms. As the witcher's gaze met Princess
Makeda's, he flashed her a charming wink and one of his signature charismatic
smiles, capturing her attention. He then began to speak, and Xirdnedh translated
for him once he had regained his composure. The court remained silent, eager to
hear what the famous witcher had to say.

Xirdnedh couldn't help but notice the witcher's wink and charming smile directed at the princess, but chose not to comment on it, only smiling to himself in amusement. Fortunately, Xirdnedh managed to convey Putnam's charisma while translating. The witcher introduced himself first to the negus and then to the court, eloquently explaining his reasons for being there and even offering to complete the contract free of charge. However, the negus graciously declined, insisting that payment would not be an issue. The court listened in rapt attention

as the renowned witcher spoke, impressed by his confidence and presence.

Putnam's magnetic personality had an undeniable impact on the negus, who granted him the privilege to address him by name, Badru, instead of his title, which was a rare occurrence in the court. This served to demonstrate the witcher's exceptional charisma and influence. Badru then went on to provide more detailed information about the contract, elaborating on the details that the witcher had already been made aware of. The court remained captivated as the two men, with Xirdnedh acting as the intermediary and occasionally asking his own questions, discussed the specifics of the mission.

Badru provided further details in parts, beginning by disclosing that the identity of the entity behind the mass murders in the country was unknown, but all signs pointed to it being human. Multiple testimonies, including that of Xirdnedh Jr, supported this claim. Secondly, Badru emphasized that the decision to hire a foreigner was not due to necessity, but rather a precautionary measure to avoid risking any more of his people. He did not want to jeopardize the assets of his kingdom, including the witchers of the School of the Lion and the Paladins of the Zang. Despite the fact that these groups had a long history of conflict and had even nearly destroyed each other in the Massacre of Isayu Fasil, Badru highly regarded them as the guardians of his kingdom. The Paladins protected against human threats, while the witchers protected against monsters. Although monsters were no longer a significant problem, they, maintaining a delicate balance with the witchers of the School of the Lion was crucial to ensure the continued existence of the civilization of Zangvebar, which included both humans and non-humans. Badru was resolute in his determination not to repeat the same mistakes as other rulers who had allowed schools such as the School of the Scorpion in Ofir or the [School of the Rhino](#) to be destroyed.

Finally, Badru expressed his gratitude for the witcher's humble demeanor, but reassured him that even if he continued to decline, a generous reward would still be granted, and he could do with it as he pleased. In addition, Badru promised to provide all necessary assistance to ensure the contract was completed with utmost effectiveness.

After that, Badru instructed his servants to bring the witcher's reward, and Putnam was taken aback. He had never seen so much wealth gathered in one place, not even during his time in Ofir. The reward was a huge chest that, when opened, revealed an overwhelming amount of glittering gold coins and precious stones. So impressed was Putnam that he couldn't resist touching and even

biting the coins to confirm their authenticity. And indeed, they were genuine.

Xirdnedh let out a laugh after seeing that, and after the meeting, he went on to explain that the Aksum dynasty was renowned for their immense wealth. They had discovered gold mines with such abundant reserves that even after several generations, the royal treasury remained brimming with riches. The sheer amount of money was so vast that it had even been responsible for ruining the economy of Hannu at one point.

As he touched the coins, Putnam felt their weight and examined the intricate designs on each one. The precious stones were equally impressive, shining brightly in the light. Putnam couldn't help but feel a twinge of greed as he gazed at the treasure before him. It was a fortune beyond his wildest dreams, and he knew that it would bring him security and comfort for years to come.

In that moment, memories of Tubiel flooded his mind, and he couldn't help but miss her once more. He remembered their plans for a quiet life together and even the idea of adopting a little boy that had come to them almost two years ago. He wished she was well, wherever she was.

But as quickly as the temptation came, Putnam pushed it away. He reminded himself of his duty as a witcher and the importance of honor and integrity, as outlined in the Griffin's Witcher Code. He had accepted the contract to help the people of this land, not to amass wealth for himself.

While the reward was undoubtedly substantial, perhaps even exaggerated, he accepted receive it, with the condition that he would only take it once the problem was solved. He felt a sense of satisfaction knowing that he could use the reward for a greater purpose than just personal gain. The money would provide him and Tubiel with security and comfort, and even allow them to give a hypothetical adopted child the life it would deserved.

Looking up at Badru, Putnam expressed his gratitude for his generosity and promised to fulfill his contract to the best of his abilities.

Badru was genuinely impressed by Putnam's moral fiber and dedication to his duty. He felt that the witcher's values were a rare find in the world, and it inspired him to do better. To show his appreciation, he offered Putnam and Xirdnedh Jr the assistance of his Royal Bodyguard, who had already started investigating the murders. Although Badru had stopped the investigation to protect his Royal Bodyguard, he trusted his intuition that the bodyguard could

be of help to the witcher. Furthermore, he believed that the witcher would also ensure the bodyguard's safety. Therefore, he offered the assistance despite his reservations.

His Royal Bodyguard's name was Nexotli Kikombe Kivuleal, an ancient "Jaguar Knight" who belonged to the Nauatilistli of Tepeyóllotl, which was similar to an Order of Knights in the Northern Kingdoms, but in the Apumayu Basin. While the Nauatilistli were more akin to the Paladins of the Zang than to traditional knights, their armor made them more comparable and earned them the nickname "Jaguar Knights" in many places.

Nexotli's story is fascinating because he was a man displaced in time. He had lived through the revolutions that occurred in the Apumayu Basin in the 12th century when the people overthrew their tyrannical rulers and adopted a "dwarf-like" economy. Unfortunately, he found himself on the wrong side of history when he was tasked with defending the puppet king of Tolpo from assassination, and he failed. As a result, a mage of the rebellion artifact-compressed him, turning him into a jade figurine.

Nearly a century later, a diplomat from Apumayu presented the figurine to the negus as a gift. Impressed by its intricate details, the negus decided to give it to his mage advisor, since their details were too good to have been carved by hand and that needed investigation. Shortly after, the mage discovered that the figurine was not a mere decoration, but an artifact-compressed person. After finding out, Badru ordered the mage to decompress him, and soon after, Nexotli was released from his nearly century-long compression.

Overwhelmed with gratitude for being released from his artifact compression, Nexotli eagerly immersed himself in the current state of affairs, eager to learn about the world he had missed while he slept. He was determined to adapt to his new surroundings, and one of the first steps he took was to learn Suati.

Nexotli's heart was filled with a deep sense of indebtedness to Badru for freeing him from his nearly century-long imprisonment. He felt compelled to repay the negus's kindness, and he made a solemn vow to become his loyal protector. He pledged to defend Badru with his life if necessary, utilizing all his knowledge and skills to keep the negus safe from harm.

Putnam thanked Badru for his offer and assured him that he and Xirdnedh Jr would put the Nexotli's skills to good use. They planned to continue their investigation, starting with the possible leads the "Jaguar Knight" had already

uncovered and with the negus's acceptance, Putnam, Xirnedh Jr, and Nexotli bid their farewells and asked for a carriage to facilitate their travel. Little did they know, however, that they would have an unexpected passenger on board.

The Mortuary

Upon leaving the palace, the newly formed trio consisting of the witcher, bard, and "knight" wasted no time and set out on their investigation, determined to uncover the mystery behind the being and its mass murders. They were relying on the possible clues that Nexotli had uncovered during his unfinished research. The Jaguar Knight's first destination was the city mortuary where they hoped to find some valuable information reevaluating the area, as the saying from Ebbing goes, "four eyes see more than two," and in this case, there were six. The group arrived at the mortuary and immediately began their search, carefully examining the remains of the deceased in the hope of finding any clues that could aid them in their quest.

Nexotli took the lead, moving silently between the rows of mortuary tables, scrutinizing the remains of the deceased once again. He carefully inspected the bodies for any signs of something he may have overlooked before, searching for any possible connection between the victims that could aid in unraveling the mystery. Putnam and Xirdnedh Jr trailed closely behind, also giving the bodies a thorough examination, in the hope of spotting something that Nexotli may have missed.

As the trio searched through the mortuary, they discovered that all of the victims had died in a similar fashion - their hearts had been brutally ripped out from their chests. This was a clear indication that the being responsible for the murders was, at the very least, not entirely human. However, Nexotli pointed out that the size of the handprints left on some of the victims was too small for the culprit to have been a two-legged walking monster. This made him suspect that the perpetrator might be human, but there was definitely something strange about it.

Then, much to Nexotli and Xirdnedh Jr's chagrin, Putnam followed his intuition and began to turn over all the corpses. However, their disapproval turned to shock when Putnam found what seemed to be signs of an "infection" in the area of the ankles on several of the corpses. It was very slight, but it was there. He quickly called Nexotli and Xirdnedh Jr over to see it, and Nexotli was reminded of the books on demons that an old friend had in her home. The infection did not

seem to be anything that the victims were sick with and the killer had attacked, but rather a trace of demonic corruption, a "mark" so to speak.

Although Nexotli's friend lived far away in the southern city of Mizzan, he suggested they should visit her for help in deciphering the potential significance of the ankle infection. The rainy season was three months away, and it would make travel more difficult, so it was important to act quickly. Nexotli knew that his friend was an expert in the field of demonology and could provide valuable insights into the nature of the most likely demon responsible for the murders. He hoped that together, they could find a way to stop the being or possible demon before it claimed any more victims.

Putnam initially hesitated to go to Mizzan, fearing that it might be a waste of time and suggested they confront the situation head-on. However, Xirdneh Jr managed to convince him that it was too risky, and they needed to gather more information before making any rash decisions. Therefore, in the end, they decided to visit the Jaguar Knight's friend in Mizzan.

As the trio left the mortuary, their minds were filled with the gruesome details of the case they were assigned to investigate. They made their way to the stables to retrieve their carriage, which they had parked nearby, and set off for the south. As they journeyed through the jungle, the sun slowly began to set, and they decided to set up camp for the night.

While setting up the camp, Putnam's witcher hearing picked up a whisper from the supply area of the carriage. Upon investigation, to his horror, he found that Princess Makeda had stowed away in the carriage, hidden among their supplies. Xirdnedh Jr, later translated the whispered comment to mean that they reeked of corpses, which was likely the result of their recent visit to the mortuary. Putnam was shocked and frustrated, fearing for her safety, and knowing that her presence could complicate their mission.

As the situation became increasingly tense, Makeda attempted to speak to Putnam in Common Nordling Language to explain herself. However, her knowledge of the language was very basic, and Putnam's angry expression persisted. Frustrated, Makeda then attempted to speak in the Creole between Sauti and Nilgaardian, hoping that she might be able to better communicate her thoughts and feelings. Despite her efforts, Putnam's face remained stern and unyielding.

It wasn't until Putnam called on Xirdnedh Jr to translate for him that Makeda was

finally able to properly convey her motivations. With the language barrier finally overcome, Makeda explained why she had stowed away in the carriage. Xirdnedh Jr quickly translated her words, revealing that the princess was tired of feeling limited within the palace. Despite being educated in various areas, she was going to be used as a mere political pawn to expand Zangvebar's influence in the Apumayu Basin. She wanted to prove to her father that she was not just another pawn in an arranged marriage, and that she was capable of being a good ruler like him or her cousins, who were also candidates for the crown.

Following Makeda's explanation, the trio engaged in a heated discussion about what to do with her. Eventually, they came to the decision to allow her to accompany them. They reasoned that they were already too far from the capital to return and that it was their duty to keep her safe. However, they made it clear to Makeda that she must obey their orders and not interfere with their investigation. Makeda was relieved to have escaped the confines of the palace and excited to embark on an adventure. She vowed to be respectful of their investigation and to learn as much as she could from their journey.

As they go to sleep, the atmosphere remained tense, and Putnam couldn't shake off the nagging feeling that something was amiss. He pondered what other unforeseen events awaited them on their journey, and what secrets lay hidden within the case they were investigating.

Meeting Ezana

For two weeks, the group journeyed southward towards Mizzan, optimizing their travel time by utilizing riverships that frequently traversed the rivers of Zangvebar. During this period, they had ample opportunity to bond and get to know each other better, resulting in a deepening of their friendship. The shared experience of their journey, with all its twists and turns, served to strengthen their camaraderie and build trust among them.

During their journey, Putnam found himself facing a variety of local monsters, either as a contracted job or as a favor to the captains of the riverships. The group's frequent travel on ships that crossed the rivers allowed them to encounter many aquatic monsters, such as the watramama, which Putnam fought in the murky waters of one of the rivers. He also faced aerial monsters such as the roc, which he fought in mid-air with a combination of his crossbow and acrobatic skills. This last contract, was unfortunately very difficult, and the crossbow that Gah'el gifted him, ended up destroyed.

While most of Putnam's challenges were aquatic or aerial in nature, there were some cases that involved different types of monsters. One particularly challenging encounter was with a specter known as Moke Konkoko, a distant relative of the succubi known as Naamah, and a langbobisuzi. Throughout these battles, Putnam often teamed up with Nexotli, who served him as a guide and helped him face these unfamiliar monsters.

Makeda was deeply impressed by Putnam's skills and bravery, which reminded her of the legendary heroes of the past, such as Sambo or the early Paladins of the Zang before they became, in the eyes of many, oppressive enforcers. She found herself increasingly drawn to him, not only because of his abilities but also because of his compassionate nature towards those he helped along the way, as well as his exotic appearance.

Xirdnedh Jr was quick to notice Makeda's attraction to Putnam, and he saw an opportunity to create new material for his songs. As a result, while acting as a translator between the two, he also added his own flair to the translations by rendering Putnam's words in a more romantic way, hoping to kindle a relationship between the princess and the witcher.

During this time, Xirdnedh also took the opportunity to create songs that narrated Putnam's confrontations against different monsters. Some of these songs became so popular that they even reached the Northern Kingdoms. One of Xirdnedh Jr's compositions, entitled "The Lord of the Night", was particularly noteworthy as it would turn out to be partly prophetic of the witcher's near future. The song told the story in first person, of a witcher who fought against the creatures of the night, wielding his silver sword with deadly skill. The lyrics were so captivating that they drew crowds whenever they were performed, and soon the song became an anthem for all those who faced the dangers of the dark.

Other notable songs composed during that time by Xirdnedh Jr and inspired by Putnam were "Intoxicated" and "Too Many Women." "Intoxicated" was a lively tune that captured the spirit of Putnam's wild and adventurous lifestyle, with lyrics that spoke of drinking, fighting, and taking risks. "Too Many Women," on the other hand, was a more reflective ballad that touched on the witcher's tumultuous love life. Emerging, it is said, from a drunken night out, in which Putnam was "too sincere."

As the years passed, "Too Many Women" would go on to have many versions, with different bards adding their own interpretations and embellishments to the

original, with some versions focused on the witcher's reputation as a "womanizer," while others emphasized the emotional impact that his many relationships took on him. Eventually, the original version of the song would eventually be lost with time, leaving only fragments of the lyrics and the memories of those who heard it.

These two weeks were also crucial for Putnam's integration into the country. He was no longer seen as just another foreigner, but was now known as *Debre Simien Seraf*. This name was derived from the nickname Jezkier had given him, "The Golden Griffin." The locals translated the name into their own language, Suati, and it stuck. This was a sign of Putnam's growing acceptance among the people, and it helped him to feel more at home in his new surroundings.

After two weeks of travel, the group finally arrived at their destination, Mizzan. The city was an imposing port with architectural influences from the Apumayu Basin region due to its proximity. Its people were a mixture of those from the Apumayu and those from the country, giving it a unique character that Nexotli held dear, for it reminded him of his old home, albeit with a century of differences. Putnam, like with so much things in Zangvebar, was impressed by the city and wondered what it would be like to visit the neighboring region.

However, they had not come for tourism, and time was of the essence. They knew that the being responsible for the mass murders in Zangvebar could strike at any moment. The fact that it had been quiet for too many weeks only meant that the next attack would be worse. They had to visit Nexotli's friend to confirm if what they had discovered in the mortuary was the work of a demon or not.

After settling in and replenishing their supplies and strength, the group set out for Ezana's house. It was situated on the outskirts of the city, a small but well-kept abode that had seen better days. Nexotli had known Ezana for years and had always considered her a woman of great wisdom and knowledge. If anyone could help them understand the nature of the possible demon they were dealing with, it was her.

Upon arriving at Ezana's house, Nexotli knocked on the door. A tall, thin, and beautiful woman answered. It was Ezana, looking not much older but more experienced since the last time Nexotli had seen her. After exchanging pleasantries, Nexotli explained their situation and the reason for their visit.

Ezana was a former member of the Paladins of the Zang, specializing in demon

hunting throughout her life. However, she now lived in exile. This was a result of her unorthodox romantic relationship with Caleb, a witcher of the School of the Lion. The Paladins of the Zang strictly prohibited any kind of romantic involvement with witchers, as they were seen as outcasts and not to be trusted. In addition to "thieves who took their work" by being much more efficient. However, Ezana's relationship with Caleb was not just taboo because of his witcher status, but also because of his albinism.

In Zangvebarian culture, albinism was stigmatized and often associated with evil or bad luck. This made it difficult for Caleb to find acceptance in society, and his relationship with Ezana only added to the scrutiny they faced.

Ezana listened carefully and asked them to come inside. She offered them some refreshments and then asked them to elaborate on the details of the case. Then, Nexotli, began to explain his progress, while Xirdnedh translated for Putnam, after that, he told him about the last clue Putnam had found in the mortuary. After hearing about the infection, Ezana acknowledged that it could be caused by a demon, but she wasn't entirely certain since the symptoms of corruption were mild and vague. She added that the other clues, such as the hearts being ripped out, could also be attributed to a popbawa. She admitted it would be unusual since they were known to be peaceful, but not unheard of.

Putnam let out a frustrated sigh, believing they had wasted their time upon hearing Ezana's uncertain response. However, Ezana informed them that there was someone who could help them - her estranged boyfriend, Caleb. She explained that Caleb had become obsessed with the being responsible for the mass murders and wanted to eliminate it. This was his attempt to regain his position in the School of the Lion since he had been exiled for his relationship with her and because Caleb's asocial behavior, which was a result of the discrimination he faced for being an albino, Ezana decided to join the group and lead them to him. She explained that if she didn't accompany them, Caleb would likely see them as a threat and attack them. Ezana was the only one who could reason with him and convince him to help.

The group were grateful for Ezana's help and eagerly accepted her offer to lead them to Caleb. They quickly gathered their things and followed her out of the house. As they walked through the city streets, Ezana filled them in on Caleb's current whereabouts and state of mind. She warned them that Caleb was not in a good place mentally and emotionally, and they needed to approach him with caution.

Meeting Kaleb

After covering a considerable distance on foot, with Ezana now officially part of the group, they finally reached the carriage and set off towards Kaleb's location. Luckily, Kaleb was not too far away as he still adhered to the traditions of the Lions by defending a province from any monster that posed a threat. However, due to his exile, he limited his efforts to a small area, mainly Nizzan and its neighboring cities.

After traveling for several hours, the group finally arrived at Kaleb's isolated hideout located in the mountains near the city of Nizzan. As they approached the entrance, Ezana called out to him, and after a tense moment, Kaleb emerged from the shadows. Putnam was relieved to see another witcher. It made him feel less alone than he had felt in Ofir, despite the clear cultural and language differences. Kaleb's albinism did not surprise him, nor did his feline pupil eyes of an unnatural green and the medallion, similar to that of the Cats, but with a more complex design. However, it was the weariness on Kaleb's face that caught Putnam's attention. He looked tired, but at the same time ready to continue fighting.

As Kaleb approached them, Putnam couldn't help but notice the tension in his body language. Despite this, the group greeted him warmly, believing that Ezana's warnings might have been exaggerated. However, they were wrong. In an instant, Kaleb pulled out his steel sword and began attacking them, believing that Ezana was coerced by the group. As Kaleb launched his surprise attack, the group was caught off guard, not expecting to be attacked by Ezana's boyfriend, not at least too soon. Nexotli, being the closest to Kaleb, was the first to step up and defend Xirdnedh Jr and Makeda. Despite being outmatched, Nexotli fought valiantly, managing to hold his own for a short while before succumbing to Kaleb's skillful swordplay. Putnam, being a witcher, was able to hold his own for longer, but Kaleb's ferocity and determination proved to be too much in the end.

It was only after Ezana pleaded with Kaleb to listen to her that he lowered his sword and allowed them to explain their reason for seeking him out.

Immediately, Kaleb helped them up and congratulated them on the duel, with Putnam replying with a "thank you" in Suati, one of the few words he knew how to pronounce correctly in that language. Kaleb then invited the group into his hideout. As they settled in, Kaleb revealed that their timing was impeccable, as

he had finally gathered crucial information about the being responsible for the mass murders. After months of tracking and investigating.

Kaleb's first revelation was that the being responsible for the mass murders was, at one time, a human criminal known as "The Hunter" or Mwindaji in Suati. This nickname followed the Zangvebarian tradition of erasing the names of criminals from history. Mwindaji was believed to have been killed for helping The Ants or Mchwa, a Aen Nílfe resistance group similar to the Aen Seidhe Squirrels in the Northern Kingdoms, but with even more aggressive terrorist tactics. The Mchwa were so named because they used the underground structures built by their ancestors to hide and launch attacks, making them a persistent problem for centuries.

Kaleb's second revelation was that the criminal had been possessed by a demon. Although Kaleb didn't know the specific type of demon but he was certain that The Hunter had been possessed. Kaleb recalled a specific encounter in a salt factory where The Hunter's skin became irritated upon touching the salt. This was a common material used in exorcisms to expel demons, and it confirmed their suspicions. Ezana added her own confirmation of this fact. The group felt a sense of relief, knowing that they were right from the start. Kaleb explained that he had confronted The Hunter multiple times, attempting to stop the murders in Nizzan and the neighboring cities. Unfortunately, The Hunter was incredibly strong, and Kaleb was always forced to flee.

Kaleb also mentioned that The Hunter had marks on his arms that were similar to the ones found on the bodies in Zagwe, but more intense. This information was important for the group as it provided further evidence of the demon's involvement in the murders. However, the last revelation was crucial because Kaleb had managed to discern a pattern in the demon's movements after months of investigation. The pattern was highly structured, indicating that the demon was likely being aided by someone or something. This revelation raised more questions, but the group knew that they would eventually find the answers they sought.

Armed with the information provided by Kaleb, the group was now poised to plan their next move with utmost care and precision. They were determined to put an end to the reign of terror that had caused so much pain and suffering to countless people.

The Mbwiri Possession / Battle against The Hunter (March 1279)

The group settled into Kaleb's hideout and spent about three days analyzing all the information that the albino had gathered. As they did in Zagwe, they tried to look beyond what a single person had seen to move forward. The hideout was not the most comfortable or attractive place, but they had camped in worse places during their two-week journey to Nizzan. The view, however, was spectacular, which somewhat compensated for the discomfort.

Kaleb went into greater detail about the information he had gathered, explaining the patterns that The Hunter exhibited. This allowed the group to form more accurate theories about who might be assisting him, if indeed he had any help. For instance, one of the patterns that the Lion had uncovered through his obsessive study was that The Hunter targeted important figures first before going after civilians, in order to throw everyone off his trail. Furthermore, with Putnam and Makeda asking probing questions, Kaleb was able to focus more on any anomalous behaviors he may have observed during his encounters with the possessed, in hopes of identifying what type of demon they were up against and better preparing for their confrontation.

For the first two days of their stay in Kaleb's hideout, the group made little progress in their analysis. However, on the third day, their fortunes changed after Putnam lent Makeda the bestiary that he had received from Kifeda at the beginning of the journey, allowing her to peruse it and pass the time. As she was examining the demon section, Kaleb passed behind her and glanced at the book. He noticed something that he had seen in The Hunter, which Putnam had not recognized due to his difficulty with Late Ellyon, whereas Kaleb was able to decipher it. The answer was right under their noses the entire time.

According to the bestiary, the demon possessing The Hunter was a Mbwiri or Mibi'wiri, a rare, medium-ranked demon known for its extreme danger. After the victory against the Aen Nílfe, there was a plague of these demons as a desperate attack by the elves, which resulted in the deaths of many people with elipesia. These people did not have the demon, but the initial symptoms of their possession were confused with elipesia, and since then, the prejudice remained. The Hunter's behavior suggested that he was in an advanced middle to late stage of possession. This explained his rare "killing fetish" of ripping out hearts and the "marks" found in the corpses. In reality, he had been absorbing their souls by attacking that organ. If they found the hearts, they would probably be withered and also, most of the "infection marks" had been mild, as it had been a quick soul absorption process.

After conducting the inquiry, it was evident that the group needed to better prepare themselves. They used the ancient bestiary as a reference, along with the updated information provided by Kaleb and Ezana. However, the latter was limited since the Mbwiri was considered a type of demon expelled centuries ago. Using the information about its patterns, they attempted to predict where it would appear next. They all agreed, especially Kaleb, that the most likely location was in the south. The question remained as to which part specifically.

The group had initially considered splitting into four, each member going to a different possible location. However, upon further reflection, they realized that it was a risky plan. Even a witcher as experienced as Kaleb had been unable to defeat The Hunter alone, so the chances of success for each of them individually were slim. With this in mind, they decided to split into two teams, which reduced the number of possible locations to two. This plan was both riskier and safer at the same time.

Putnam and Kaleb, with Xirdnedh Jr serving as their translator, would venture together into the Fire Mountains, a volcanic range known for its harsh terrain and ancient ruins. Kaleb speculated that The Hunter had several bases in different ruins throughout the country where he could hide until the shock of the deaths caused by him had passed and then attack again. Meanwhile, Ezana and Nexotli would return to Mizzan. If The Hunter attacked again, it was likely that he would target that city following his pattern of killing important people and then civilians to throw them off the trail, especially since it was one of the most populated cities in the south of the country. This made sense because the more people, the more possibilities to kill, and the more possibilities to cause confusion and escape without being pursued.

Once both groups had reviewed the plan, and were fully prepared to exorcise the demon and confront it with the appropriate materials, such as salt and cursed oil, they set off for the potential locations.

Kaleb and Putnam's team took extra precautions by packing essential survival gear, such as food and water, as they headed towards the Fire Mountains. The journey was treacherous, with steep inclines and rugged terrain, but they persevered. With Xirdnedh Jr serving as translator, the two witches were able to communicate more effectively, and their bond strengthened, eventually leading to a friendship.

After trekking through the treacherous terrain of the Fire Mountains for what felt like days, Kaleb and Putnam's team finally stumbled upon an ancient ruin that appeared to be The Hunter's lair. Recent footprints found in nearby plants heightened the likelihood of The Hunter being in the area. The team cautiously approached the ruin, weapons at the ready, and senses heightened by potions. As they entered the ruins, they heard a strange noise coming from deep within the structure. They moved forward, slowly and cautiously, prepared for whatever they might encounter.

In addition to serving as a translator, Xirdnedh proved to be a valuable ally in the fight against The Hunter. He helped them to create the salt circle, for trapping the demon. With the circle complete, the witches stood ready to confront The Hunter, their weapons gleaming in the dim light of the ruins.

As they reached the center of the ruins, they came face to face with The Hunter, who was sharpening his spear. The demon was a formidable opponent, but Kaleb and Putnam made a great team. Putnam confronted The Hunter when necessary, preventing Kaleb from getting injured and allowing him to focus on leading the demon towards the salt circle. They worked together seamlessly, coordinating their movements to lure The Hunter towards the trap.

As they moved closer to the circle, The Hunter's attacks grew more frenzied, but the witches were determined to end his reign of terror. With a final coordinated push, they managed to trap The Hunter inside the circle. However, their victory was not yet secured. The demon emerged from The Hunter's body and attempted to attack and wound them several times, but the witches were well-prepared. Their swords were bathed in cursed oil, allowing them to repel the demon's attacks. With quick and precise movements, they performed the necessary rituals to banish the demon back to its own dimension. Finally, they breathed a sigh of relief as they watched the demon disappear, knowing that they had saved countless lives from its wrath.

But even though it seemed like everything was coming to a close, the story was far from over. After successfully exorcising The Hunter, they planned to present his head to the Negus for Putnam to collect the reward, and for Kaleb to potentially be reinstated in the School of the Lion. Everything seemed normal, with no signs that the deceased possessed had received any assistance, as they had speculated.

However, Xirdnedh Jr, being knowledgeable about The Hunter's story, felt a little

empathy and suggested that the possessed's corpse deserved a dignified burial. After all, The Hunter had paid enough for his crimes of aiding the elves while being possessed by a demon. Kaleb was hesitant, but ultimately, the Lion witcher agreed to Xirdnedh's suggestion. As the group was preparing to decapitate The Hunter and bury his corpse, they were horrified to discover multiple marks on the back of his neck. These marks were identified as part of the Paladins of the Zang's simple magical teachings, and it became clear that The Hunter had been immobilized by them prior to his possession. This revelation led Kaleb to conclude that the former liberators of Zangvebar, once champions of the people, were now attempting to seize power. By using a possessed individual to eliminate important figures and then appearing as saviors, they sought to stage a coup and take control of the country.

With the potential consequences of inaction weighing heavily on his mind, Kaleb knew that the group needed to act swiftly and carefully. The Paladins were likely to blame the court mage for the possession, and the negus for his inaction, using it as a pretext to rally support for their coup. As such, the group needed to uncover the traitors' plans and halt their attempt to overthrow the ruler of Zangvebar before it was too late.

The Paladins' rebellion and the romance with Makeda (Mid-March 1279)

After making that discovery, Xirdnedh also recalled the Kasai Rex and its invincibility, wondering if it too was the work of the Paladins. Kaleb did not dismiss the idea, and they promptly returned to their hideout to share their findings with Makeda. Makeda was grateful to be with them and expressed relief that they had managed to deceive the commonfolk into believing that she was merely training for diplomatic missions. She knew all too well that if the Paladins of the Zang had any inkling that she was still in the palace, they would not hesitate to kidnap her.

Putnam, on the other hand, initially considered her presence to be a nuisance due to concerns about her safety and the potential for diplomatic conflict between Ofir and Zangvebar in the event of her accidental injury or death during their mission. However, he came to realize that she was right. If the Paladins wanted to target her and use her as leverage against the negus, they would have to go through them first.

In the hideout, they waited for Ezana and Nexotli, hoping that their trip to Nizzan had been uneventful, and that they would bring back interesting news. It

seemed strange that they had not returned after so many days, considering that Nizzan was only a few hours' ride away, unlike their journey to the Fire Mountains. Finally, as night fell on the day of their arrival, they spotted Ezana and Nexotli, but their hopes for a peaceful return were quickly dashed when they saw their appearance. It was a bittersweet feeling. As they approached, the group could see that both Ezana and Nexotli looked terrible. Nexotli's armor was dented and covered in dirt, and Ezana's eyes held a look of disappointment. It wasn't disappointment from "failing" in the city, but something else entirely.

Without wasting a single moment, both teams caught up with each other and shared what they had obtained. Kaleb, Putnam, and Xirdnedh Jr started by informing Ezana and Nexotli about the terrible discovery they had made after locating and defeating The Hunter. Unfortunately, Ezana and Nexotli only confirmed their discovery. At the same time that they defeated The Hunter, a rebellion took place in Nizzan, probably one of many rebellions taking place in the country, led by the Paladins of the Zang to overthrow the current government. The Paladins argued that the government was weak, permissive, and decadent, and that it was bought by foreign forces that would only lead Zangvebar to its destruction, just like what happened to the country of Tenoch under its puppet government at the time. Ezana and Nexotli barely escaped the rebellion by the skin of their teeth. The situation was undoubtedly discouraging, but they could not afford to remain inactive and allow the corrupt paladins to succeed. They spent several hours discussing the best course of action, with Makeda's safety being a top priority. However, it was evident that fleeing the country was not an option.

In the end, they decided to return to the capital. If the rebellions were only taking place on the borders of the country, they could at least warn the negus and find a safer place for Makeda and the Aksum dynasty to be protected. Since it was already the middle of March, the soon-to-come rainy season would likely slow down the rebellions, giving them some time. With luck and the help of His Majesty, they hoped that the uprisings would remain contained and not lead to a full-blown civil war.

It was indeed a risky decision, but they knew that staying in the hideout near Nizzan was even riskier. Therefore, without hesitation, they set out on their journey back to the capital, taking the less-traveled routes to avoid any potential danger. With the addition of Ezana and Nexotli, their group was now stronger, and they could watch each other's backs. They hoped to make it to the capital

without incident and to warn the negus of the potential danger that threatened the stability of the country. During the two weeks of travel, they also took the opportunity to give Makeda a crash course in self-defense and the use of weapons, such as swords and crossbows, in case the need arose. Makeda proved to be a good student, quickly picking up the techniques and skills.

During that time, due to the situation and the work done by Xirnedh Jr in "translating", the romance between Makeda and Putnam emerged. The group, except for Xirnedh Jr who was very happy for them (and that he had new material for his songs), said nothing. They were in a situation where they might not make it out alive. Therefore, the 19-year-old girl experiencing her first love with the witcher and the witcher indulging in a "whim" did not seem wrong to them. Besides, none of them had the right to judge, especially not Ezana and Kaleb.

Putnam and Makeda's physical relationship was a reflection of the emotional connection they had developed. They were often seen holding hands or embracing, stealing glances at each other when they thought no one was looking. When they did manage to communicate, it was through a mix of broken phrases in Nordling or Suati and a shared language of touch. Makeda would trace her fingers over Putnam's scars, while Putnam would softly kiss the top of her head. They were in tune with each other's needs, and it was clear that they cared for each other.

As for the sexual aspect of their relationship, it was not something they flaunted in front of the group. Instead, they kept it mostly to themselves, stealing moments whenever they could. The intensity of their physical attraction was tempered by a sense of respect and tenderness that made their moments together all the more meaningful.

For the rest of the group, their relationship was a welcome distraction from the grim reality of their situation. Seeing the two of them together gave them hope and reminded them of the beauty of love, even in the face of danger. It was a reminder that there were still things worth fighting for, even when the world seemed to be falling apart.

One advantage of their trip back was that, besides being relatively quiet and safe, they were able to gather information about the situation in the country from the people they met along the way. Most of the people they encountered were friendly, though they still had to be wary of river corsairs who had been

hired by the Paladins of the Zang to eliminate dissidents and tried kidnap Makeda every time they identified her. However, the situation was not as dire as they had feared, as the Paladins had only taken control of certain territories and the crown still had the ability to counterattack and quell the rebellion with relative ease. Their only concern was whether the capital had already fallen to the rebellion or not.

As they traveled, they learned that many of the people in the country were opposed to the Paladins' actions and were actively resisting their control. They heard stories of brave persons who were fighting back against the new oppressive regime that was trying to rise up, and they saw evidence of this resistance in the form of hidden weapons caches and secret hideouts, although the negus had not called for action against the paladins, the people themselves had begun to use guerrilla warfare. This gave them hope that the rebellion could be defeated and the country restored to its former glory.

At the same time, they also learned about the devastating impact the rebellion was having on the people. Many were struggling to survive as the paladins confiscated their crops and livestock to feed their own armies. Others had been forced to flee their homes and were living in makeshift camps, struggling to find enough food and water to survive. In addition to the natural hazards of the jungle, such as predators and monsters, they also had to face the Mchwa who used the chaos in the country to launch fierce attacks against humans and Putnam and Kaleb found themselves many times defending innocent people from these dangers.

After two long weeks of travel, they finally arrived at the outskirts of the capital, their emotions mixed at the sight before them. Though relieved to see that the capital still stood, the evidence of the attempted siege was palpable. Without a moment's hesitation, they made their way to the Royal Palace and met with Badru once again. Despite his disapproval of Makeda leaving with the group, he was partly relieved to see her return safely. He was also pleased to learn that Putnam, Xirdnedh Jr, and Nexotli had successfully completed their mission of eliminating The Hunter. Badru offered Putnam a way to leave the country with his reward, as he had fulfilled his contract. However, Putnam refused, stating that while the monster was dead, its source was still active (i.e. the Paladins of the Zang) and would continue to pose a threat until it was resolved. Putnam saw it as his duty to see the matter through, rather than a mere "question of price."

After that Badru provided them with the latest news about the rebellion, which was still in its early stages. The Paladins of the Zang were gathering their forces to make another attempt on the capital, but this time, the crown was prepared. They had the support of loyal forces and the remaining witches of the School of the Lion, and they were planning a surprise attack on the stronghold of the Paladins of the Zang in Gondar. Badru felt betrayed by the Paladins, as he had tried to strike a balance between the group that had once liberated the country in the distant past and the more recent Lion witches. He wanted to preserve a balance between the old and the new.

Deep down, Badru felt sorry for the Paladins. They had been consumed by the need for a glory that would never return and the fear of being replaced. However, as a ruler, he had to prioritize securing his reign and the stability of his kingdom. Therefore, he had to eliminate the Paladins if he wanted to ensure the long-term prosperity of his country. Though it pained him to do so, he knew it was a necessary step, and regarding Kaleb's exile, Badru issued a Royal pardon order for him, allowing him to return to the School of the Lion despite the reluctance of some witches.

The Siege of Gondar and the end of the rebellion (Early - late April 1279)

Gondar was originally the capital of the Zangvebar colony during the so-called Golden Empire of the Aen Nilfe, and it was located near Zagwe. After the Paladins liberated the country, they decided to transform Gondar into a fortress city, similar to [Darn Mylne](#) in Vicovaro during the 14th century, making it their main base of operations. The decision was made to move the capital to Zagwe, which was a small settlement and the birthplace of Karuri, the founder of the Paladins of the Zang, as a way to honor him. Over time, Zagwe grew into the beautiful city that Putnam saw when he visited. It was evident that the fortress city would be heavily guarded and protected, given its significance as the base of the Zang and its historical importance. Therefore, during the remainder of March, they meticulously planned their assault, taking into consideration the impending siege that the Paladins were also preparing against the capital, as well as the weather conditions. They aimed to launch their attack as soon as possible, while also taking advantage of the incipient rainy season to aid their strategy.

The numbers of the Paladins, although smaller than in their heyday, were still significant enough to face the negus and all those who supported him. Moreover, it had to be taken into account that they had supporters as well. These included all those who had benefited from the deaths of important individuals that The

Hunter and creatures like the Kasai Rex had caused. The benefits that these monsters had left behind to their allies, had provided the Paladins with the army they used to try and besiege the capital.

On the other hand, the witchers of the School of the Lion were the ones who suffered the most losses in the Massacre of Isayu Fasil, losing approximately 70% of their members, while the paladins lost 30%. This left only around 150 witchers at most, who were divided between Apumayu, Zangvebar, and providing protection against monsters and pirates for Zangvebarian traders. However, they were able to contribute around 50 witchers, who with their superhuman abilities would be worth more in battle. In exchange for this contribution, Badru agreed to ensure their existence in the future, even if they were to become extinct by preserving all their knowledge including their mutagenic formula.

With the invaluable help of Xirdnedh Jr as his translator, Putnam would lead these witchers as an elite force during the siege. Although he considered that there were likely better candidates for the job, he ultimately accepted the task. This would be his second military experience, and it would prove to be even more valuable than the first, as it would prepare him to face the Haaki Invasion in the distant future.

After weeks of preparation, the long-awaited moment of the siege had arrived. The rainy season had started, and both armies were ready for battle. The distance between the two cities was not great, and it took barely a day for them to come face to face. It was a particularly rainy night, and the sound of the raindrops hitting the ground echoed through the darkness. It must be said that, despite everything, Badru made a last attempt to negotiate before the siege began. However, the paladins refused, stating that they would never negotiate with a "traitor to the homeland" like him. Confident in their capabilities, numbers, and armament, they decided to initiate the attack instead of defending themselves. Their plan was to reach Badru's camp and kill him, destabilizing and demoralizing not only their forces, but the entire country in the process. This was actually a possibility that Badru had contemplated. He hoped that if the paladins did not agree to negotiate, he could at least provoke them enough so that their arrogance would become a weak point, and he could eliminate them easily. However, what he did not expect was that the paladins had their own plan in case that variable happened.

Badru had planned to send the 51 witchers to infiltrate and quickly finish off the most important members or arrest them for trial while they laid siege to Gondar.

However, as soon as the paladins began implementing their plan for that scenario, the negus quickly had to divert those resources to something else. From the fortress city, as if it were the apocalypse itself, all kinds of mutated and possessed monsters that had been commissioned to rogue mages for their protection began to emerge. These monsters and crossbreeds were ready to fight to the death. Putnam found himself in the midst of this chaos, and although he thought he might die there, at least it would be a good way to die.

The witches, led by Putnam, fought well against the monsters with the effectiveness of experienced professionals. They faced all kinds of creatures, from local mutated beasts to possessed beings, but nothing could have prepared them for what came next. A huge creature, even larger than the size of a sea serpent, with a cobra-like appearance and possessing Zangvebarian dragon genes, emerged from the fortress city. The Snake Hybrid was a formidable opponent, with scales that shone like diamonds and fangs that could tear through solid steel. It towered over the witches, casting a shadow over them as it approached.

For a moment, Putnam was unsure of the best course of action. He knew that the Snake Hybrid posed a significant threat to the success of the assault, but sending the witches to fight it would put them in harm's way. They were tasked with the critical role of opening the way to the army, and he could not afford to lose them in battle against the monster. After weighing his options, he made the difficult decision to take on the creature by himself.

With a nod to Kaleb and the other witches, Putnam stepped forward, his sword and silver chain at the ready. As he approached the monster, he could feel his heart pounding in his chest. The Snake Hybrid towered over him, its massive body coiled and ready to strike. Without a second thought, he threw the silver chain, which snagged on the creature's body, and began to climb the massive monster. His plan was to direct the creature towards the fortress city, against its commissioners, while trying to reach its brain to kill it.

The Snake Hybrid writhed and twisted, attempting to shake Putnam off its back. However, Putnam's grip remained steady and unwavering, and he continued to climb up the creature's massive body, striking its nerves with his silver sword and disorienting it. As they approached the fortress city, Putnam noticed the fear in the paladins' eyes. They understood that their commission had turned against them, and they were powerless to prevent it. The sight gave Putnam a sense of satisfaction, knowing that the paladins were finally facing the consequences of

their actions. As he climbed the massive creature, Putnam did not expect that its size would allow him to breach the walls of the fortress city. However, this turned out to be a fortunate turn of events. The breach allowed the 50 witches to gain access more easily and take out the most important members of the paladins, arresting some of them in the process. The regular army also took advantage of the opening to enter and engage in battle. While Putnam played a critical role in the success of the assault, it was Kaleb who truly emerged as the hero of the what would be known in the future as the Battle of Gondar.

After his long and arduous climb, Putnam finally reached the brain of the creature and dealt the fatal blow that caused the Snake Hybrid to collapse, destroying several buildings in the process. However, his victory was short-lived as he lost his grip on the creature and fell from its body, crashing down onto the ground with a sickening thud. The impact knocked the wind out of him, and he slipped into unconsciousness. When he finally came to, he found himself buried under a pile of rubble, his body battered and bruised. Groaning in pain, he tried to move, but the weight of the debris pressing down on him made it impossible. His head spun with dizziness, and his vision swam as he struggled to make sense of his surroundings.

Despite the odds against him, Putnam had miraculously survived the fall, thanks to his quick thinking and the weak Heliotrop Sign he had managed to make just in time. For days, he remained trapped under the rubble, struggling to stay alive. News of his supposed death spread rapidly, particularly after Badru contacted Nibras, who then shared the news to all Ofir and their embassies. Nibras was insistent that they find him quickly to avoid any issues between the two countries. If Putnam had indeed perished, he would be given a hero's funeral, a fitting tribute for his contributions in battle and to both countries. However, if he was still alive, time was of the essence, and if they didn't rescue him in time, there would be severe consequences.

The news of Putnam's supposed death eventually reached the Northern Kingdoms and had a significant impact on three separate events. Firstly, Tubiel's adoption of Sigurd after finding him was a direct result of her belief that Putnam had passed away. She saw it as a way to honor their plans of starting a family together and raising an adopted child, despite the fact that she would have to do it alone.

The second event was a meeting with Trill at Brenna's tavern. This encounter

took place before Tubiel found and adopted Sigurd but after she had learned of Putnam's supposed death. Tubiel was heavily intoxicated and in the midst of her grieving process. Consequently, she said some very harsh things about Putnam. She was feeling a mix of emotions including sadness, anger, and jealousy (having also discovered Putnam's romances in Ofir and Zangvebar). Tubiel saw Putnam's actions trying to be a "hero" as foolish, ultimately leading to his apparent death. After this encounter with Tubiel, Trill would compose an adaptation of a little-known song by Jaskier entitled "Burn, Witcher, Burn."

The third event occurred when Tubiel's drunken state led her to let her guard down, allowing her to be spied on by one of the Gardunnia's agents. This spy obtained the necessary information for both the criminal organization and the sect survivors to seek revenge against her for her actions. The woman nicknamed as the *Lioness of Brenna* had achieved some success in her mission and had successfully dismantled the large mage sect she had uncovered, as well as some members of the Gardunnia. However, this success ultimately led to her downfall and came sooner than expected.

After enduring two long and exhausting days trapped under the rubble, Putnam was finally discovered and rescued. Putnam's body was battered and broken from the weight of the debris that had collapsed around him. His clothes were torn, and his skin was covered in dust and sweat. His body ached from the lack of movement and the pain from the injuries he sustained during the cave-in. The group that had been searching for him had been working tirelessly for hours, digging through the rubble with their bare hands and crude tools.

When they finally found him, buried deep beneath the rubble, their relief was palpable. They gently cleared away the debris, careful not to cause any further harm to his fragile body. Finally, they reached him, and they carefully lifted him out of the rubble, cradling him in their arms.

Putnam was barely conscious, his breathing shallow and labored. He was in dire need of medical attention, and they quickly began to administer first aid to stabilize him. They used water to clean his wounds and cloth to wrap his broken bones, doing everything they could to ease his pain and make him comfortable.

After arriving at the Royal Palace of Zagwe, Putnam was immediately tended to by the negus's doctors, who worked tirelessly to alleviate his injuries. In addition to the doctors, the negus's mage was also called upon to assist in his recovery. The mage utilized their magical abilities to aid in his healing, working closely

with the medical team to ensure that his injuries, especially his broken bones, were fully addressed.

Despite his physical recovery, the following weeks proved to be quite uneventful. The only exciting thing was being reunited with his team, although even that became routine after a while. Makeda was present but spent much of her time tending to her duties as a princess. The weather was also uncooperative, with endless days of heavy rain.

However, there was some good news. Putnam learned that the rebellions in various cities had been thwarted following the defeat of the Paladins in Gondar. This was a significant victory for Badru and the loyalists to the Zangvebarian Crown. It gave Putnam a sense of satisfaction, knowing that he had finally fulfilled fully his contract, and all was even.

Leaving Zangvebar and Ofir behind (May - July 1279)

Once he had fully recovered, the witcher made the decision to leave Zangvebar with his well-deserved reward. Although he had developed feelings for Makeda, both of them knew that a romantic relationship between them was impossible, particularly due to the demands of their respective professions. In Makeda's case, she would likely be required to marry a foreign monarch for the benefit of the country, making it even more challenging for them to pursue a long-term relationship.

Unfortunately, they couldn't say a proper goodbye due to the princess's busy schedule, leaving a sense of unease between them. For once, Putnam was not responsible for leaving another woman with just a letter and a bag of coins. Before departing, he wrote a letter to Makeda expressing his feelings and thoughts, which he entrusted to Xirdnedh for delivery and translation. He hoped that it would bring some closure to their relationship and that Makeda would understand his decision to leave.

The letter expressed how much he would miss her and how their time together had been a memorable experience. It also acknowledged the challenges of their professions, making it difficult to pursue a long-term romantic relationship. However, he hoped that they could remain friends.

With a heavy heart, Putnam bid farewell to Zangvebar, hoping that his letter would provide solace to Makeda and that she would understand his decision to leave.

As for the group of friends that had formed after all that had happened, Putnam said goodbye to them in a more conventional way and promised to keep in touch with everyone. It was an emotional moment, and Xirdnedh Jr expressed how much he would miss the witcher, stating that he was practically like family. Putnam jokingly responded by saying that even if he exaggerated, he felt the same way too.

The farewell with Ezana and Kaleb was just as emotional, but more serious. Both of them thanked each other for everything, and Kaleb acknowledged that if it hadn't been for the witcher's appearance, he might not have regained his position at the School of the Lion or his estranged relationship with Ezana, which was now stronger than ever.

As Putnam bid farewell to Nexotli, he could sense the respect and affection that the warrior had for him. Even though Nexotli was a man of few words, his actions spoke volumes. He presented Putnam with a wrist blade, a legendary weapon that had been used by the most skilled warriors of the Apumayu Basin.

The weapon was crafted with intricate designs and was made from the finest materials, showing the skill and craftsmanship of its creators. The blade was incredibly sharp, and the mechanism that allowed it to retract and extend was seamless, a testament to the ingenuity of the Apumayu Basin's warriors.

As Putnam held the wrist blade in his

hand, he couldn't help but feel a sense of awe and respect for Nexotli and the people who had crafted such an incredible weapon. He thanked Nexotli for his gift, acknowledging the significance of the blade and promising to use it with honor and respect.

After bidding farewell to his newfound friends, Putnam decided to return to Ofir to resume the comfortable life he had built there. He also formalized his relationship with Radeyah, making them an official couple. Radeyah even decided to temporarily retire as Crown Sorceress and handed over her position to Kaledi.

During their time together, Putnam and Radeyah became inseparable. They attended lavish parties and feasts, indulged in fine wine and gourmet cuisine, and explored the many attractions that Manisa had to offer. They would often spend long hours together in the city's libraries, where they would discuss

literature, philosophy, and magic.

But their favorite pastime was indulging in each other's bodies. They would often retire to Radeyah's private chambers, where they would explore each other's desires with passion and abandon. They would spend a lot of time entwined in each other's arms, exploring each other's erogenous zones and experiencing intense pleasure. Melda, Radeyah's faithful servant, would often join in their intimate explorations. She was a pale beauty with long, blonde hair and a lithe, graceful body. Putnam found her to be a willing partner in their sensual adventures, and he and Radeyah enjoyed exploring her body almost as much as they enjoyed exploring each other's.

Despite indulging in all the pleasures that Radeyah, the city, and the country had to offer, Putnam couldn't shake off the feeling of emptiness that had been creeping up on him. During his time in Zangvebar, he had managed to distract himself from this feeling by focusing on the contract, but now it was slowly resurfacing. He began to reflect on his life and realized that, despite achieving great success as a witcher, it still felt empty without Tubiel by his side. He longed for the days when they had been together, discussing their dreams and aspirations. The mere thought of her brought back memories of the little things they used to do together, the way she used to laugh, and the way her eyes lit up when she talked about her passions. The void left in his heart by her absence grew bigger by the day, to a point where it became unbearable. As much as he loved Radeyah and enjoyed his time with her, he knew deep down that she could not fill the void that Tubiel's absence had left in his heart.

After much reflection, Putnam made the difficult decision to leave Radeyah. One reason, which had less to do with it but still influenced his departure, was that the sorceress had checked her true origins and revealed to Putnam that her biological father was Nibras. Despite this revelation, Putnam's primary concern was the emptiness he felt without Tubiel by his side. He was aware of Radeyah's character and knew that her ego, which had led her to rival the legendary Yennefer, would make it challenging for her to accept his departure. To ease the transition, Putnam sought advice from Kalesti and arranged a way for him to stay in touch with his friends in Zangvebar. He used a small portion of the wealth he had amassed in both countries to purchase a ship ticket. Before leaving, Putnam wrote a letter to Radeyah, explaining his decision and bidding her farewell. He left under the cover of darkness in July 1279, bound for the Northern Kingdoms.

Putnam had mixed emotions as he made his way back to the Northern

Kingdoms. On one hand, he was relieved to be leaving behind the hedonistic lifestyle he had been living in Radeyah's company. On the other hand, he was sad to leave her behind. Despite their differences, he had grown fond of her and enjoyed their time together. This decision would sadly take its toll, albeit many years later.

"The Peak" Pt.1 (Late August 1279)

The journey back to the Northern Kingdoms was uneventful, aside from Putnam's introspection. Some might say it was the calm before the storm. Thanks to favorable weather, the voyage took only a month. The ship made a technical stop in Cidaris, where Putnam seized the opportunity to visit Indira and seek her advice, especially on how to handle the situation with Tubiel. Indira was a good friend whom he hadn't seen in three long years, and he realized how much he had missed her.

After that, the ship headed to Novigrad, where it made its final stop. There, Putnam took the opportunity to do several things, including visiting a young Brynn, whom he invited to have some cotton candy, feeling the call of being a father more and more. He also opened an account at the Zammorto Bank to deposit all the fortune he had earned during his time in such distant lands. Obviously, the bank accepted all that money along with the jewelry. The dinars, since the establishment of the Ofir embassy in nearby Redania, and the shillings from Zangvebar were highly valued, so they suited the bank well. For that reason, the bank offered him a good contract, but unfortunately, it contained a clause limiting how much money he could withdraw. Putnam, who was anxious to get Tubiel, simply skimmed the fine print and ended up signing the contract.

After concluding his business in the Free City, Putnam boarded one of the many ships that traveled inland to Vizima. The journey lasted a few weeks because, in the capital of Temeria, he had to make a stopover and take another ship to his final destination. He finally arrived in Brenna at the end of August 1279.

During the journey, Putnam was reunited with Fabio, and they were both overjoyed to see each other again. In fact, Fabio had thought Putnam was dead due to the news about Gondar, which had left him quite sad. So it was a more than pleasant surprise to meet again on the ship after it made a stop in Oxenfurt and the explorer got on board. On the ship, the two friends caught up on everything. Putnam explained that he had not been able to contact Fabio due to everything that had happened in Zerrikania and the events that had followed.

Fabio listened attentively and was fascinated by Putnam's stories. Undoubtedly, the witcher had the heart of an explorer, even if he didn't want to admit it at the time.

Fabio, on the other hand, had less interesting things to share, but certainly important. He was on his way to visit the court of Temeria, which was one of the many courts he had already visited, to present his proposal for an expedition to the Far East. There was still so much they did not know about the world, and he wanted to shed more light on it. He offered, in return for financing, to establish a trade route to new territories that would make the monarchs immensely rich and would also allow them to break the monopolies held by the Zerrikanian Spice Company with the spices and Redania with the silk brought from Haakland.

Fabio's proposal for an expedition to the Far East had not been successful with any monarch yet, but he remained determined to keep trying. His biggest achievement so far was that House Vassermiller of Ebbing had expressed interest and said they would consider it. However, the recent history of Ebbing had made the Vassermiller's cautious and they did not want to invite any trouble from Nilgaard. The Ebbing Confederation Insurrection, in which king Juan Pablo had died, and the failure of his granddaughter Brianna's relationship with the Haakladian prince Zeus, along with a diplomatic incident, had made them more wary. Finally, after a year and a half, Meve, the queen of Rivia & Lyria, gave the go-ahead to his proposal, which was a significant breakthrough for Fabio's plans.

In other news, Fabio had fallen in love and gotten married (although it was true that he felt pressured by his in-laws). He had married a woman named Erin Oswa Aep Led, a vedyminaica whom he met shortly after leaving the court of Ebbing. He had bumped into her while he was leaving and she was coming to present a proposal to investigate the castle of Stygga. Erin was blind, but Fabio didn't mind her disability as he was smitten with her personality. Erin, on the other hand, fell in love with Fabio's active personality and his voice, which she considered very beautiful. Fabio promised her that one day he would introduce her to a witcher, as she was a collector of witcher artifacts and he was sure she would be thrilled to meet one in person. She had never met a witcher before, and he knew it would make her happy.

Putnam was thrilled after hearing Fabio's whole story, and it motivated him to consider proposing to Tubiel. After all, if Fabio and Erin could overcome the barrier of blindness, why couldn't they overcome their biological differences when it came to aging? It might be more challenging, but it was possible to

manage and even overcome. They could always resort to Tubiel drinking an Mandrake Longevity Potion to solve the problem.

Upon finally arriving in Brenna, Putnam was met with a pleasant weather but a feeling of nervousness that he had not experienced in a long time. He couldn't help but wonder whether Tubiel would agree to come back to him, or if she thought that he was dead. He was also unsure whether she was still in Brenna or had moved on to a different place. All these questions and more plagued his mind, adding to the already mounting anxiety he was feeling.

So the first thing Putnam did was to go to the mayor's house. If anyone was certain that the Lioness of Brenna was currently residing there, it was him. The old mayor liked to interact and get to know all the people who lived in Brenna. Furthermore, since Putnam had saved the place from a dangerous griffin roaming the outskirts in 1277, the mayor had grown fond of the witcher, treating him like a nephew.

As Putnam approached the mayor's house, he noticed the colorful flowers and vibrant greenery that adorned the front lawn. The mayor had always taken great pride in his residence, and it showed in the immaculate upkeep of the property. Then, Putnam knocked on the door, a sense of familiarity washed over him. The mayor's booming voice echoed from within, asking who the caller was. Putnam replied, making a joke, saying it was the ghost of past Yule. There was a tense silence for a moment, followed by footsteps, indicating that someone was running and approaching to open the door. When the mayor opened the door and saw Putnam, he did not recognize him at first. Putnam's skin had become a little browner from the trip to Ofir and Zangvebar, giving him an olive complexion, and his hair bleached by the southern sun, has turned from blond to light brown after his return to the north.

But then, the witcher smiled, and the two embraced. The witcher's smile brought a sense of relief to the mayor, who couldn't believe that Putnam was alive and well. Overjoyed to see him again, the mayor insisted that they catch up, but Putnam politely declined, stating that he had come for a specific reason. He needed to find out if Tubiel was in Brenna, specifically in the house she had bought after the fall of the Dyn Marv caravan, which they later shared.

The mayor confirmed that Tubiel was in Brenna and had recently visited to complain about a broken bridge that needed fixing due to Sigurd's injury. The

mayor was about to tell Putnam about the child that Tubiel had adopted after believing him to be dead when the witcher suddenly mounted his horse and rode off towards their house.

In a rush of excitement and anticipation, Putnam galloped down the road, his heart beating fast in his chest. He couldn't wait to see Tubiel again, to hold her in his arms and never to be separated from her again. As he rode, he couldn't help but wonder if she would still love him after all this time. But he pushed those doubts aside and focused on the present moment, determined to find her and bring her back into his life.

When Putnam arrived at the house, it seemed as though he had stepped straight out of the tales of the heroic witcher Raven, whose stories Sigurd loved to hear from the local storyteller, alongside those of the noble knights of Toussaint. He was mounted on a magnificent white steed that whinnied and reared up on its hind legs as he approached the house, while his gleaming blue Griffin armor caught the sunlight. The red-haired boy, who had been playing on the outskirts of the house, was left awestruck and speechless at the sight of this impressive figure. Sigurd couldn't believe his eyes - a real witcher, just like the ones in the stories! He was still processing this when Putnam calmed the horse and dismounted. The two exchanged glances, and Putnam gave him a soft smile, thinking he might be the neighbor's son, before turning to knock on the door.

As Putnam was about to knock, the noise caused by the galloping, braking, and neighing of the horse was loud enough to draw Tubiel out of the house, abandoning her half-prepared lunch. She was ready to reprimand whoever had caused such a commotion or had endangered Sigurd by not watching where he was galloping. As Tubiel stepped out of the house, her eyes widened in disbelief as she saw Putnam standing in front of her. For a moment, she was at a loss for words, unable to comprehend the reality of the situation. It really was him, in the flesh. It had been almost two years since they had last seen each other, and months since he had supposedly been presumed dead.

After the initial shock wore off, Tubiel remembered the breaks they had taken, always with the intention of protecting Putnam. She felt nothing but deep regret and her eyes welled up with tears as she walked towards him. Reaching out, she touched him as if trying to verify that he was not an illusion of an aguara. Putnam allowed her to run her hands over his facial scars, closing his eyes and enjoying the feel of her touch. Then she embraced him tightly, and Putnam hugged her back, feeling a lump form in his throat as he realized how much he

had missed her. They stayed like that for what felt like an eternity, lost in their own world, catching up on lost time, just like they had done on many other occasions before.

As they held each other, Tubiel and Putnam felt the weight of the past and the hope of the future. Memories flooded back, from their childhood together to their time in The Path and the summer of 1277 which they spent right there in Brenna, living together. They talked about everything they missed, everything that had happened while they were apart. Tubiel avoided telling the story of the mages and their sect, as it was not the time, perhaps in the distant future, and focused on more banal things.

As they pulled away from their embrace, Putnam noticed that Tubiel was not wearing the cat medallion that had always hung around her neck. He didn't ask her about it, but the absence of the medallion made him realize that their reunion would be different; it would be the final one, and there would be no more separations. Finally, they could live the quiet life they had talked about so much, settling down to enjoy the peace and tranquility that had eluded them for so long. They could now build a life together, without any of the past turmoil and strife that had plagued them. They were both grateful for the new chance that life had given them and were determined to make the most of it.

However, the tension arising from the emotions of the reunion was relieved when Tubiel saw the blue headband he was wearing and told him that it looked awful on him and was tacky. They both laughed as she took it off Putnam. After the moment of levity, while Tubiel finished preparing lunch and Putnam drank some water, Tubiel told him about how the village had grown, while Putnam shared his adventures and misadventures in far-off lands. They caught up on each other's lives and reminisced about the past.

After Tubiel finished preparing the lunch and Putnam shared the news of his fortune, she was thrilled but also nervous. The news brought a sense of relief, not because they were now "rich," but because they could now focus more on Sigurd's education and because the key moment of presenting Putnam their adopted son was near, as soon as Tubiel called Sigurd for lunch, and Tubiel wanted to handle it with utmost care. Although she had broached the subject of adoption with Putnam back in 1277, before their last breakup, she couldn't help but feel nervous. All that was happening it was unexpected, yes, but life is full of surprises, and Putnam was back in her life. She was happy that he was not dead, and they could start their family together.

As for Sigurd, she had not spoken to him about having a father. When Tubiel found him lost in the woods with amnesia, she was still grieving Putnam's supposed loss, and she did not want the eight-year-old boy to be affected by it. She had taken it upon herself to raise him, and she wanted to make sure he was loved and cared for. Tubiel had given him a home, a family, and an education.

Tubiel had dedicated many months to raising Sigurd on her own, and now with Putnam back in their lives, she felt that the family was finally complete. She was eager to ensure that Putnam and Sigurd would develop a strong and positive relationship. A part of her was confident that they would get along well, but another part could not help but feel a sense of dread. Despite her mixed feelings, Tubiel was determined to make the presentation of their adopted son to Putnam a memorable one. As soon as Sigurd was called for lunch, Tubiel's heart began to race. She wanted to handle the introduction delicately, knowing that the topic of adoption was still an important matter to Putnam, although he had not said so in those moments, she knew him well enough to know that this was the case.

As they sat down for lunch, Tubiel took a deep breath and began to speak. She explained how she had found Sigurd alone and abandoned in the nearby woods, about to be devoured by wolves, suffering from complete amnesia. She told the story of how she had taken him in and cared for him, and how he had become the son they could never have biologically due to Putnam's witcher infertility. She described how Sigurd had grown and thrived under her care, and expressed her belief that Putnam would make an excellent father to him. Tubiel's eyes shone with emotion as she finished speaking, and she looked to Putnam with hope in her heart.

But before they could discuss it further, Sigurd interrupted with a series of questions for Putnam. Tubiel gently reminded him to be quiet, but Putnam laughed and told her to let the boy ask questions. Sigurd's curiosity and excitement were evident, and Putnam happily answered each question. It was clear that he already felt a connection to the boy.

Over the course of the meal, Putnam and Sigurd talked and joked together, getting to know each other better. Tubiel watched with a sense of relief and happiness, seeing that they were getting along well.

After lunch, Sigurd insisted that he and Putnam go outside to play with his wooden swords. Tubiel smiled, happy to see them bonding over such a simple activity. She cleaned up the dishes and went outside to watch them play.

As she watched them spar with their wooden swords, she couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment. Seeing her son and her partner bonding like this was all she had ever wanted.

Later that day, after Putnam and Sigurd had tired themselves out, they all sat down together to discuss their future as a family. They talked about Sigurd's education and future aspirations, and Putnam expressed his desire to be involved in his son's life as much as possible. The following day, Putnam went to the village council to have the boy's name officially changed to Sigurd Pitch, later known in history as Sigurd Pitch of Brenna.

As they talked, Tubiel realized that she had never been happier in her life. She was surrounded by the people she loved the most, and they were all working together to create a bright future for themselves.

It was a new beginning, a new chapter in their lives, and they were all excited to see where it would take them.

"The Peak" Pt.2 (Early September 1279 - Mid-October 1279)

During the first few weeks of his new life, the witcher couldn't shake the feeling that he would never get used to it. Although the year 1277 had been a successful experiment, a part of him still couldn't quite believe it. He had become so accustomed to wandering back and forth that waking up every morning in the same place felt strange and unfamiliar to him. When he lived with Radeyah, things were different not only because he was away from home, but also because of the hedonistic lifestyle they both indulged in.

However, as time passed and he spent more time not only with Sigurd but also back with Tubiel, it stopped feeling so strange and became normal. Eventually, even the simple things of that life became an adventure that he enjoyed very much. The witcher realized that he had found something he never knew he was missing: a family. He had one in Kaer Seren, with the other Griffin Witchers who survived the avalanche that nearly wiped them out and raised him, but this was different. The sense of belonging and connection he felt with Tubiel and Sigurd was something he had never experienced before. It was a feeling of completeness, of being a part of something bigger than himself. He knew that he had finally found his place in the world, and he was determined to protect it at all costs.

During that time, which was almost ideal, because nothing is perfect, the witcher

did not cease to be what he was by nature and by education – a witcher. From time to time, he would take on a contract, but they were small tasks, nothing spectacular. For instance, he dealt with some annoying ghouls in the vicinity or some plague of irritating drowners in the river. However, he took on these contracts without charging, thinking more about Sigurd's safety than about money or the safety of Brenna. Not that he lacked money, though. Sure, it was a disappointment to discover that the bank limited the money he could withdraw until literally 101 years from that moment because of the contract he had, but it was enough to live quite comfortably. For the witcher, protecting his family was more important than any amount of coin.

The main "imperfection" of that almost perfect and bucolic time was that Tubiel was worried about the potential effects of Putnam work as a witcher could have on their son. She feared that Sigurd's fascination with his father's profession might lead him to want become a witcher himself, which could ultimately put him in harm's way. As only a few witcher students survived the mutations process, the possibility of losing Sigurd was a constant source of concern for Tubiel.

Despite Putnam's efforts to show Sigurd the harsh realities of the witcher's life, the boy continued to idolize his father and his work. Sigurd followed his father everywhere he went and even sneaked along on one of his contracts, which was a significant cause for alarm for both Putnam and Tubiel. They spent a lot of time discussing Sigurd's safety and future, trying to find a way to steer him away from the dangerous path of becoming a witcher.

Tubiel didn't initially worry too much about Sigurd's love of stories about witchers and knights, as they were just stories with morals attached. However, with Putnam's presence and his own adventures to share, Sigurd's admiration for his father only grew stronger. The boy had his own hero at home, which only fueled his fascination with the dangerous world of witches.

Overall, the family's concerns about Sigurd's safety and future grew more intense with each passing day. While Putnam tried to balance Sigurd's admiration with a dose of reality, the boy remained deeply enthralled with the idea of becoming a witcher like his father. This was not ironic, but rather curious. Although they were not related by blood, it seemed as if the boy had inherited the fascination for witches that Putnam's adoptive father, his deceased grandfather, had. Eventually, Sigurd's persistent fascination paid off and Putnam began to train him. The training was a mix of witcher education and general

education as Putnam and Tubiel tried to find a middle ground between what Sigurd wanted and what they wanted for his future.

Other than that, their life in Brenna was ideal, with Putnam and Tubiel fully integrated into the village community. Unlike in 1277 when they were more focused on themselves. Putnam went from being known as the witcher to simply Putnam, Put, or Sigurd's father. Many of the inhabitants, beyond the mayor, took a liking to the bicolored-eyed witcher and considered him just another neighbor, like so many others.

Putnam found himself joining in with the local activities, from festivals to helping out with the village repairs. They saw him as a hardworking and reliable member of their community, always willing to lend a helping hand to those in need. Whether it was fixing a broken fence, helping with the harvest, or even just listening to someone's problems, Putnam was there.

Meanwhile, Sigurd quickly made friends with the other children in the village. They played together in the fields, swam in the river, and explored the surrounding forests. Despite his fascination with witches and his "training," Sigurd was just like any other child, always looking forward to having fun and playing.

"The Peak" Pt.3 (Late October 1279 - Early November 1279)

"Someone important to me gave me this ring a while back. Today, I found it again and it made me think of you. Perhaps it's not the best ring, nor the most elegant, but I think it's beautiful, just like you. I want to spend the rest of my life with you, Tubiel. Will you marry me?"

—Putnam to Tubiel, in early November of 1279

As the days passed by, the end of October drew near. Putnam had not forgotten his conversation with Fabio on the ship, which had left him with the desire to propose to the Lioness of Brenna. However, he didn't want to do it in a typical way. He wanted the moment to be special, unique to the two of them. Not pompous, nor even overly "romantic," but simply special.

But there was a problem. Putnam had yet to find the right ring for Tubiel. He had searched high and low, but the options available were either too ostentatious or too simple. From bad imitations of elven designs to bad imitations of dwarven styles, nothing quite fit his taste. It wasn't that he had anything against the local jeweler, but their offerings just didn't match his style. And that was one of the

many things he admired about Tubiel – her aversion to pomp and grandeur.

And so it went on for several days, with that question going through his mind like an intrusive thought. Sometimes, he would stare off into space, lost in thought, while smoking his green ofiri pipe outside the house or while watching Sigurd play with the neighbor's dog. Other times, he would get distracted while making food, and more than one meal was almost burned as a result. Putnam wanted to propose soon, but without rushing it.

Until one morning, were the red-haired boy was frantically searching for his favorite stuffed animal, scouring every nook and cranny of the two-story house, without realizing it, he stumbled upon the solution that Putnam had been searching for. The boy approached his father for help in finding the lost toy, and as they searched together, they eventually found it. During their search, Putnam discovered something he had forgotten he left behind after the last breakup, tucked away in a drawer of a piece of furniture that had been broken since 1277. It was an engagement ring that his adoptive father, Johan, had given him before he was killed by prostitutes. The metallic ring was a deep shade of purple, with a simple yet effective design.

Finding the ring brought mixed feelings, but it also reminded him of Johan's words at the time: that he should give it to someone who deserved it at just as he had done with his painter wife. It made Putnam smile a little. He would have liked Sigurd to have had one of his "grandfathers" alive, although they didn't count Keldar because they still hadn't decided what to do about Sigurd and his desire to become a witcher and although he missed Johan, he felt a sense of peace and relief now that he had found the ring. He knew it was the perfect ring for Tubiel, as it reflected her own personality, understated yet beautiful.

The discovery of the ring gave Putnam the push he needed to finally propose to Tubiel. He decided to do it that very evening, after they finished dinner. He would keep it simple, just like he wanted, without any grand gestures or proclamations of love.

After finding the ring, the rest of the day passed normally for Putnam. He followed his usual routine, which involved teaching Sigurd in the morning. Although he was a little late that day because of the search for the stuffed animal, he managed to catch up quickly. Then he prepared lunch while Tubiel returned from the market. They had lunch together, chatting about their day and plans for the weekend.

Later that afternoon, Putnam watched as Sigurd and his friends ran around, laughing and shouting while he supervised them. The peaceful moment allowed Putnam to reflect on his future and the love he had for Tubiel. He was confident that she was the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with, even with the biological differences in their aging. He knew that they would have to find a solution to this problem eventually, but for now, he was content to enjoy their love for each other and take things one step at a time. As the boys played, Putnam couldn't help but smile at the thought of proposing to Tubiel later that evening.

As evening approached, Putnam found himself growing increasingly nervous. He couldn't believe that he was finally going to propose to Tubiel. Despite his nerves, he tried to distract himself by helping her prepare dinner. However, the feeling of excitement and nervousness lingered. After they finished their meal, Putnam took a deep breath and decided that it was time to pop the question. As usual, after dinner, he went to Sigurd's room, which had once been the old small library in the house that Tubiel had refurbished and turned into the boy's bedroom. He told him a bedtime story and then returned to Tubiel, who was waiting for him in their shared room. On the way to the room, he hesitated for an instant, wondering whether to do it in the traditional way and get down on one knee to offer her the ring. However, he quickly remembered his plan to keep it simple, without any grand gestures or proclamations of love.

As Putnam entered the room, he spotted Tubiel nestled comfortably in bed, her attention fully absorbed by a book. Despite his nerves, he summoned the courage to take a deep breath and approached her, his heart racing with anticipation. As their eyes met, she beamed a warm smile in his direction, and Putnam knew in that moment that he was ready to take the next step.

After exchanging a few casual words,
Putnam proceeded to undress, as was their
custom when they slept together. As he took the ring out of his pocket, he
couldn't help but feel a mix of excitement and nervousness. With a trembling
hand, he held out the engagement ring for Tubiel to see. Tubiel's eyes widened in
surprise as she stared at the ring, taking a moment to process what was
happening. Then, a smile slowly formed on her face, and with a slight nod, she
gave Putnam her answer, accompanied by an amused laugh. But as she
expressed her happiness, Tubiel also shared her belief that their love for each
other transcended symbols like rings, weddings, or paperwork. To her, they were

already as good as married in every sense that truly mattered. However after seeing the joy in Putnam's eyes, she was happy to accept the ring and become officially engaged to him.

The Preparation and the Wedding (December 1279 - January 27, 1280)

Unlike many other couples, Putnam and Tubiel did not take long to prepare for their wedding. Their unique status and education as witcher and witcheress, respectively, played a role in their decision-making process. Despite having the financial means to organize a grand and spectacular event, they opted for a more intimate ceremony that reflected their personal preferences. However, deciding on the location proved to be a challenge as they did not want to hold the ceremony under the umbrella of any particular religion.

Despite the offer from the mayor of Brenna to hold the wedding in the village, Putnam and Tubiel declined. Although the village was small, and the risk of the Melitele priestesses finding out was low, they did not want to put the mayor or the villagers in danger. Instead, they continued to search for a location that was more in line with their personal beliefs and values.

Finally, and quite curiously, Sigurd indirectly found the solution to their wedding location dilemma by remaining steadfast in his determination to become a witcher and not abandon his dream, despite Tubiel and Putnam's suggestions. The answer was Kovir, as its laws permitted civil or religious marriage, with money being the primary guiding rule of the cold kingdom. Furthermore, they could take Sigurd to Kaer Seren, where Keldar could attempt to convince him to abandon his witcher aspirations. While this plan was risky and could potentially reinforce Sigurd's desire to become a witcher, they felt they had to give it a try. They even considered holding the wedding at the Griffins' fortress, which held special symbolism for them since they had first met there as children.

With the decision made, they packed their belongings and embarked on the fastest ship they could afford. Fortunately, the weather was on their side, almost as if it knew the significance of their journey. After a month, they finally arrived at Lan Exeter in December of 1279.

Sigurd, who had never ventured beyond the Brenna area (or at least, couldn't remember doing so), relished the journey. He was so happy that his joyful mood was infectious and spread to Putnam and Tubiel. It was a beautiful experience,

one that felt almost too perfect to be real. However, little did they know, that last statement held some truth.

Tubiel (and also Putnam), lost in their "fairy tale" / happy ending, did not realize (especially Tubiel, who had been very paranoid at the beginning) that all that time they had been spied on, and it would continue even after they had left Brenna. By whom? Well, by the Gardunnia, for one of their allies, Mimit. The Gardunnia had collaborated without opposition since Tubiel had indirectly messed up several of their clandestine operations. When the mage discovered more about his origins and later about Putnam, he was neither surprised nor happy. To him, his brother had survived, and that was it. "*Well, that's fine, he'll serve me for something, surely as a lab rat since he is a Source*".

With Tubiel, it was different. He held a grudge against her. In his eyes, she was a simple and atupid human who had destroyed his lifetime's worth of work to become the greatest sorcerer in history by mastering a power greater than that of a demon. And now, she was going to walk away unscathed with a happy ending? No, he was not going to allow it. He believed that everything had consequences, and he would ensure that Tubiel paid for hers.

His revenge would be proportionate to all the damage that Tubiel had caused him by dismantling his grand project. And it certainly wouldn't be gentle. At first, the mage thought about kidnapping the boy who was technically his adopted nephew, but soon he found no use for that. The boy didn't seem to have anything special, and the idea of kidnapping a child seemed boring to him. However, after reading the reports that the Gardunnia had sent him detailing how close Tubiel and Putnam appeared to be, he decided that kidnapping his own brother was a better option. He had nothing against the witcher, but he did have something against Tubiel. She had taken everything he wanted - his grand plan, his "deserved" power - so he would take one of the people she loved the most in return. Wasn't that fair?

Besides, Putnam was a Source. He knew it since he read the description of his "curious eyes" that matched those of the missing mother of both, making him the perfect conduit to channel and bring the Cosmic Horror that he served to The Continent, deceive it, and absorb its power. It would take him months to accomplish that, but it was still less time than it took him in the past to convince and unite mages to his sect, which would then have been used as a sacrifice for a corporeal form of the dark god he served.

Upon their arrival in Lan Exeter, they were greeted with a thick blanket of snow that covered everything in sight. Despite the cold weather, Sigurd was fascinated by the unique design of the city. He couldn't believe that the streets had been replaced by canals, and that gondolas were the primary means of transportation. During their stay, they were forced to wait out a blizzard that swept through the area. But despite being stuck in the city for several days, they didn't mind one bit. Sigurd, in particular, was smitten with the place and even suggested that they could stay there and live out the rest of their days.

As they departed from Lan Exeter and continued on their journey to Kaer Seren, they took the safest route to avoid any potential danger. The snow-covered landscape stretched out before them, with towering mountains in the distance. They encountered a few travelers along the way, mainly merchants, but for the most part, the journey was quiet and uneventful.

The reception in the rebuilt fortress was more cheerful than usual, at least on Keldar's part. He was very happy to see Tubiel again after four years without seeing her. The old man's affection for the girl had not changed at all since the last time. Once the lively welcome was over, the couple commented in a general way on all the new things that had happened in their lives, as well as introducing the "big new thing" (i.e., Sigurd) and explaining why they were there, since they had not come to spend the winter in the standard witcher sense.

The rest of the witches welcomed them warmly, as usual, but couldn't resist their curiosity about Sigurd. Was he a new student? That remained to be seen. In total, there were about 35 people in the fortress, including Putnam, Tubiel, and Sigurd. It wasn't because all the survivors of the avalanche that had rebuilt Kaer Seren were there, but because there were 25 witches and around 10 students whom Keldar had gradually recruited once Putnam, Kemro, and Zivor had graduated. Most of the students were Sigurd's age or younger, and the red-haired boy quickly made friends with them during his short time in the fortress.

Among the 25 witches were some, like Gah'el or Vargos, who had spent almost the entire month cleaning the stables as punishment from Keldar for leaving Jolanta without saying anything. It's not that the old man had a great fondness for the School of the Cat, not even during the times when Kristov was with D'yaeb'l (with the exception of Tubiel), but abandoning Jolanta in that way seemed somewhat indecent and not worthy of how a Griffin should behave.

And once they had settled in, Putnam and Tubiel in Putnam's room (formerly the

late Coën's room) and Sigurd with the students (as it thrilled him), although at first Putnam and Tubiel were not in agreement, they eventually allowed him to sleep with the students (although Tubiel was a little more hesitant). The couple went to talk to Keldar in depth, who listened attentively and in silence, with that serious look that characterized him so much, to Putnam and Tubiel's words. They expressed their concerns about their adopted son's dream of becoming a witcher.

After they finished speaking, there was a moment of silence which was interrupted by Keldar who pulled out his pipe to smoke and contemplate the matter further. Matlena, from the upper floor, shouted down at him to not smoke indoors. Putnam couldn't help but chuckle, and Tubiel smiled slightly. After several puffs, the old master spoke and suggested that they discuss the wedding with the rest of the Griffins first, and only proceed if everyone agreed. However, they were strictly forbidden from inviting any mages. As for Sigurd (this was more directed towards Tubiel than Putnam since the witcher couldn't deny that he was secretly happy that Sigurd wanted to follow in his footsteps and Keldar picked up on this), he should be allowed to train for at least two years, as this would be beneficial for him. If he could endure the training, they would try to mutate him. In addition, even if he didn't become a witcher, he would gain a set of skills and knowledge (since they were not from the School of the Cat) that would serve him well in the future. Keldar saw great potential in Sigurd. Tubiel, ultimately, agreed somewhat begrudgingly.

The wedding took a month to prepare and celebrate. This wasn't because they had to convince the other witches in the fortress, as the majority of them, except for Keldar who didn't like the idea of bringing unknown people into the fortress, and Olivier who found it too cheesy, quickly agreed. It had been a while since they had celebrated anything, the last being Keldar's 300th birthday which ended quickly because the grumpy old witcher didn't want any celebration. But because of other issues, such as food, guests, weather (which would affect the arrival of the guests in time), etc.

Fortunately, as they were more than the Wolves, it didn't take too long to prepare all the things necessary for the wedding, as they could divide the tasks that needed to be done. Gah'el and Olivier took care of the food (since Olivier refused to make flower crowns or other decorations, claiming that he would die of cheesiness overdose), Matlena along with Tubiel took care of the bridal gown, which they went to pick up from Lan Exeter (although they had to make several

visits to the city and it took a while, as they looked for one that was more traditional from Temeria, because Tubiel didn't want to wear what she considered the "tacky" typical bridal gowns from Kovir), Putnam took care of writing the invitations to the guests, once he and Tubiel discussed who should come to the wedding, Elcon was responsible for organizing the music and he searched for a talented bard. He eventually found Jezkier, who had recently returned to the North. Upon learning that it was Putnam's wedding, Jezkier readily agreed to perform and even offered to do it for free, hoping to repair his damaged friendship with the witcher. This initially caused some tension, as Elcon was unaware of the past conflict between Putnam and Jezkier. However, the two were able to reconcile their differences and make peace, Kemro and Zivor took care of the decoration and the location, deciding that it would be a good idea to have the ceremony on the fortress' private beach, taking advantage of the improving weather at the end of January, finally being celebrated on January 27, 1280. Vargas and Putnam went to pick up the groom's suit, also from Lan Exeter, and lastly, Keldar agreed to officiate the wedding.

As for the expenses, they were covered by the fortune that Putnam had earned in the Far South. Fortunately for everyone, although there were limits on the amount of money he could withdraw, the higher value of the dinars compared to other currencies made everything feasible.

Regarding the
guests, there were

only a few. This was due to both Tubiel and Putnam wanting a more private ceremony and the conditions set by Keldar. Putnam tried to contact his acquaintances from the Far South, but unfortunately, it was impossible. In the end, he decided to invite Fabio and his wife, but only Fabio could attend, as Erin had an important family matter to attend to. Despite being excited to visit a fortress of witchers, she had to prioritize her family first. So Fabio was the only guest on Putnam's side. On Tubiel's side, the only guest was [Caldigi](#), a former member of the School of the Cat who had reformed as a member of the [School of the Fox](#) after the fall of Dyn Marv. Tubiel considered him like an older brother and felt he should be at the wedding. At first, Keldar was very hesitant to accept him, but in the end, after corresponding with Velcal, the grandmaster of that southern school, he agreed to let Caldigi come, but only if [Velcal](#) accompanied him, as Keldar still wasn't completely trusting.

Throughout that time, especially due to the

activity of the witches outside their fortress and the vast spy network of Gardunnia, Mimit obtained even more information than he needed and planned his revenge with the precision that only an ego-wounded mage could have. It would be a simple yet effective plan, since the fortress was not protected against magical attacks, considering that it took time to rebuild it and the Griffins believed that the mages were satisfied with the previous attack. During the banquet, he would open a portal, transport his two golems with him, kidnap Putnam, and let the golems deal with any opposition.

Finally, after days of calm and blissful anticipation, the wedding day arrived. The ceremony was held on the private beach of the fortress, which was surrounded by the serene, dark blue waters of the north sea. The scene was breathtakingly beautiful, with the sun shining down on the sand and the waves gently lapping at the shore. The wedding was a small and intimate affair, with only the Griffins, Fabio, Caldigi, and Velcal in attendance. The couple exchanged vows under a simple yet elegant arch adorned with white flowers, with the sound of seagulls and the ocean providing a peaceful backdrop. It was a perfect moment of pure love and joy, shared between two people who were truly meant for each other.

However, the storm that would change everything finally arrived. When the banquet was in full swing and everyone was enjoying the festivities, Mimit made his move. With the accuracy and efficiency that only a mage seeking revenge could possess, he opened a portal and quickly kidnapped Putnam, leaving his golems to handle any opposition. The witches, caught off guard, fought valiantly but were ultimately unable to stop Mimit from escaping with his captive and some of them, like Velcal died in the process.

"The Long Fall" Pt.1 (Late January 1280 - late May 1280)

For Putnam, who was instantly knocked out by Mimit, the entire attack at the wedding felt like a nightmare from which he would soon awaken. Unfortunately, reality proved him wrong, and he was struck with overwhelming force when he realized he had been kidnapped and trapped. For the next four months, he would endure the worst period of his life.

The room where he was trapped was completely white, including the walls and ceiling that were illuminated by two spherical lights. These lights appeared to be a prototype of one of Ortolan's inventions, which, like many others, did not come to fruition due to Rissberg's internal sabotage. However, it appears that someone had recovered the plans to recreate them. The lights seemed to have some type

of magical energy supply, as if they were a lightning bolt trapped in a bottle.

Putnam was chained hand and foot with white-painted chains made of what appeared to be dimerite. It was evident that this was a well-planned and organized kidnapping, and he was left alone in this sterile, intimidating space. He couldn't fathom how long he would be held captive or what the purpose of his imprisonment was. The only thing he could do was to wait and hope for someone to come to his rescue. In any case, during the first few days of waiting, he tried to break the chains to gain mobility, but he was unsuccessful.

Meanwhile in Kaer Seren, after everyone had recovered from the shock of Mimit's sudden attack, they buried Velcal and sent Gah'el as a representative to Burov Mylne to offer condolences to the members of the school. Tubiel burst into tears from the frustration she felt and explained everything she had investigated and unraveled, fulfilling her fear of putting the Griffins in danger with the mage thing. They began to organize themselves, as they were not going to let Putnam, who had meant so much to the school, fall into the hands of the mage, whatever the mage wanted to do to him, which was sure to be no good at all. And, most importantly, Putnam was "family" and they had to rescue him, no matter what.

Curiously, Velcal's death would mark one of the most difficult times for the School of the Fox, but it would also lead to the rise of Adalwulf as grandmaster, sometime after the Foxes had welcomed him following the dissolution of the Wolves in 1273. However, that is a story for another time.

So, continuing, a search and rescue team was organized. The team consisted of Tubiel, Kemro and Zivor, who were the first to volunteer after Tubiel declared that she would lead the mission. Followed by Vargos, Fabio, Caldigi, and lastly, surprisingly, Jezkier. He claimed that he had saved Putnam's life in Zerrikania (which was true) and insisted that he was essential for the team. In reality, he still felt guilty about everything that had happened in Ofir, and this, along with his previous actions at the wedding, was his way of redeeming himself, since his skills weren't exactly the most suitable. Once the team was created and ready, they headed to the druids who were in charge of mutating the new Griffins as soon as possible before embarking on any journey. They needed their help for one simple reason: they had to find the trail left by the portal to rescue Putnam, and they had only a few hours left before it vanished completely.

After finally arriving, they explained the whole situation to the druids, who agreed to help. Unfortunately, several of the horses they used broke their legs on

the way to the druids, so they had to continue on foot. So, by the time they returned to the fortress with the druids, the trail of the portal had grown faint, and the druids could only provide them with a vague idea of where Putnam might have been taken. The druids informed them that he was most likely being held somewhere in Gheso, Maecht, or Magne. The druids offered to open a portal and start the rescue from there, saving them time, but Tubiel refused. She argued that Mimit could easily detect them and set up an ambush. They would travel by non-magical means, which would take longer but be safer. Time was running out, and although she wanted to rescue Putnam as soon as possible, she did not want to take any risks. Once they obtained the information, the team prepared and set off for Nilgaardian territory to rescue the witcher.

During that first month, Putnam tried to maintain his sanity by keeping track of the days and practicing meditation to calm his mind. He would try to focus on his memories, his experiences as a witcher, and his hopes for the future. However, as time went on, the white walls of the room began to play tricks on his mind, and he started to experience hallucinations and illusions.

At first, he tried to rationalize these visions, thinking they were just a result of his lack of sensory stimulation. But as they grew more vivid and intense, he began to question his own sanity. Mimit's plan was working, as Putnam slowly started to lose his grip on reality.

As the weeks went by, Putnam's physical condition deteriorated, due to the lack of proper nutrition and exercise. His body weakened, and his mind became more susceptible to Mimit's manipulations. Putnam was starting to forget who he was, his memories were fading, and his sense of self was slipping away.

But still, despite everything, there was a spark of who he had been that refused to be extinguished. However, Mimit was not content to let the spark slowly fade away. He was patient, yes, but not enough. He knew that as long as it remained, Putnam would never be fully broken to continue with his plans. So, from the second month of his captivity onwards, he devised a routine designed to crush Putnam's spirit completely.

Mimit's tactics were insidious. At first, he would offer a glimmer of hope - a vague promise of freedom or a faint hint of a rescue attempt. Putnam's spirits would lift, only to be dashed moments later when the promise was revealed to be false. Sometimes, he would even stage fake escapes, only to capture Putnam again and subject him to even more torture and despair.

As more time passed, the routine became more brutal and sadistic. Mimit would increase the intensity of the torture, adding physical torture to the psychological torture that was already present, until Putnam was on the brink of collapse. And just when Putnam thought he couldn't take anymore, Mimit would offer him another glimmer of hope, starting the vicious cycle all over again. His witcher regeneration helped in the process, recovering him from most of the wounds inflicted by physical torture, but eventually, he reached a point where even his body could not take it, and many new scars were added to his body.

The physical torture was almost a relief compared to the mental anguish. The pain was tangible, something that he could feel and focus on, whereas the psychological torment was like a fog that seeped into every crevice of his mind, impossible to shake off. The food that was brought to him was barely fit for consumption, and often had the opposite effect on his already weakened body. The stench of decay was overwhelming, and he found himself retching and vomiting after each meal. It was almost as if Mimit was trying to slowly poison him, to break him down even more until there was nothing left except a animal in human form .

As the third month of his captivity arrived, Putnam found himself adapting to the horrid routine. He had become so accustomed to the constant torture and psychological abuse that he began to depersonalize and detach himself from reality in order to survive. The psychotic outbursts that he had experienced helped him cope, but they were also a sign that his mind was finally giving in under the immense pressure.

During this month, Putnam's witcher senses, enabled him to uncover more details about the reason for his imprisonment and the identity of his captor. However, his captor's ultimate intentions remained unknown to him, although one name, Dagon, would stick in his mind. Nevertheless, Putnam found himself caring less about the motives behind his capture and instead, solely focused on enduring the present moment.

But despite the agony he endured, Putnam never lost his determination to survive. He clung to the knowledge that he was still alive and that there were people who cared for him beyond the walls of his prison.

By the time May 30th of 1280 arrived, Putnam couldn't take it anymore. He felt alone, broken, and hopeless. All of his loved ones were now nothing more than a distant memory, barely a vague impulse that he had once been someone. Mimit

took advantage of this to experiment with him, preparing him as a vessel, seeing that he had completely fallen apart. All Putnam wanted was peace and eternal rest, and he attempted suicide multiple times, but he was always stopped just in time. Ironically, these failed attempts and subsequent recoveries forced the mage to delay his plans, which allowed Tubiel and her team enough time to locate and finally rescue him. A glimmer of hope emerged! But hope can be a double-edged sword, and Putnam was forced to confront this truth, even if he didn't want to.

"The Long Fall" Pt.2 (Tubiel's death) [Night of May 31 to June 1, 1280]

“Someone who loves you.”

—Tubiel of Brenna

For four long and harrowing months, the team, and especially Tubiel, had been tirelessly searching, hitting dead ends, and retracing their steps in pursuit of Putnam. Despite brief moments of respite, like when they stayed in Erin's old house, they were never enough to alleviate the mounting frustration and desperation. However, after all that effort, they finally found two potential locations where Putnam might be held captive.

As for Sigurd, did the son of the couple in Kaer Seren stay put, knowing what was going on? Absolutely not. Just before the team set off south, the red-haired boy, when Keldar had fallen asleep and the other Griffins were occupied, with the grace and stealth of a cat, managed to slip into the carriage in which Fabio had arrived (and from which he had taken a horse for the visit to the druids). This carriage had been borrowed from his wife's family for the wedding (which the team would later use to travel south)

The team only realized they had a stowaway, when they were already far away from Kaer Seren, on a ship out at sea. Obviously, the boy received a stern scolding for his actions, but it was clear that Sigurd only wanted to help with whatever had happened to his father. Unfortunately, he didn't fully understand the danger he was putting himself in and saw it all as an exciting adventure. Given the circumstances, the team ultimately decided to let him stay, as going back was not an option.

The two locations they eventually obtained were Darn Viesser, a citadel located next to the lake known as Loc Lebar, and Kasteel Saar, a ancient ruins situated near the Korath Desert located in Magne. Legend had it that these ruins once belonged to another school that emerged after the extinction of the Order of

Witchers. With no idea where Putnam might be held captive, the team decided to divide their efforts. Fabio and Sigurd were to investigate the citadel located within the city of Viesser to gather information on its owners and rulers. This would minimize the risk to the child and Fabio, whose cartographic expertise was more valuable than his combat skills. Meanwhile, Tubiel, Kemro, Zivor, Jezkier, Vargos, and Caldigi were to venture to the ancient ruins. Once each member had completed their assigned task, they would reunite in the city and return home together, thinking it would be just a scare that would end. Little did they know how wrong they were. That night, many things would be burned and swallowed up by the magnese sands.

As the team split up, Fabio and Sigurd made their way towards Darn Viesser, taking the winding path that led towards the citadel. The city was bustling with people, and the sound of carts and horse hooves could be heard echoing off the cobblestone streets. Fabio couldn't help but feel a twinge of anxiety as they approached the fortified walls of the citadel. They knew nothing about the rulers of Darn Viesser or what kind of reception they would receive.

Meanwhile, Tubiel, Kemro, Zivor, Jezkier, Vargos, and Caldigi made their way towards Kasteel Saar, treading along the arid terrain near the Korath Desert. The heat was intense, and the sun blazed down mercilessly, but the group kept moving forward. They were determined to find Putnam and bring him home.

As the day turned into dusk, Fabio and Sigurd managed to gather some information about the rulers of the citadel, but it was not enough to pinpoint Putnam's exact location. It seemed like they had hit yet another dead end, and now all they could do was hope that the other half of the group had been more successful and found Putnam.

The group assigned to Kasteel Saar finally arrived at the ruins as night fell. The ruins dated back to the time of the Empire of Magne, although the modifications made by others who had used them, such as elves and Nilfgaardians during their republican period, were noticeable despite their poor condition and lack of visibility due to the late hour. The ruins were heavily guarded by several individuals, primarily local mercenaries and errant knights who had fallen out of favor and turned to a mercenary lifestyle.

Observing the large number of people guarding the ruins, the group felt almost certain that Putnam was being held there. It was clear that these were not mere treasure hunters, given their appearance. So the group spent about two hours

hiding in the vicinity of the ruins, carefully observing. As they waited, the group noticed that the mercenaries and knights guarding the ruins were armed to the teeth, they carried swords, crossbows, and other weapons, indicating that they were prepared for any potential threat.

So, they worked to develop a solid escape plan to ensure that once they entered, found, and freed the witcher, they could safely flee the area. As they worked on their escape plan, the group took note of the terrain and the best routes to take. They also made sure to assess the skills and equipment of each member, assigning tasks and roles that would play to their strengths. They knew that they had to be quick and efficient, as any mistake could cost them their lives or Putnam's.

Unfortunately, even with the best plan and team, failure was sometimes inevitable and the first sign of the tragedy that would be called later the Magne Massacre was when Jezkier's distraction ended in disaster. He was supposed to distract the mercenaries and knights by pretending to be lost and claiming that Aen Manche nomads had attacked him and taken his belongings. He would then ask for their help to retrieve his things and suggest that the elves might attack the ruins, leading them far away from the ruins so the rest of the team could enter undetected. Meanwhile, Zivor would be on standby in case things went wrong.

As Jezkier began to weave his tale, the mercenaries and knights grew suspicious of his story and demanded answers. Jezkier's nerves got the better of him, and a scuffle broke out, ultimately resulting in his death after being shot by the ones with crossbows. Zivor charged towards the group in an attempt to save Jezkier, but despite his incredible strength, his size made him slower than a typical witcher and when he arrived it was too late. Nonetheless, Zivor fought valiantly, using his strength and witcher training to incapacitate several of the attackers.

As the battle raged on, Zivor realized that he might not make it out alive. Despite this, he continued to fight, driven by thoughts of his comrades and the mission they had set out to complete. However, the numbers were against him, and his injuries began to take a toll on his movements and attacks.

With a final burst of energy, Zivor unleashed a devastating attack, taking down several more of his attackers before succumbing to his wounds. The rest of the team, who had been waiting for Jezkier's signal, a song that he was supposed to start humming once the group of mercenaries and knights started to get far

enough away, heard the commotion and quickly realized that something had gone wrong. They moved quickly to take cover and assess the situation, realizing that their original plan had failed and that they had lost two of their own. The team was left to mourn the loss of Jezkier and Zivor while deciding how to proceed with their mission.

But the great tragedy had to continue, and Father Time allowed them little time to plan again. As they tried to recover from the loss of Jezkier and Zivor, Kemro, blinded by the pain of losing one of his best friends and his longtime companion on The Path, made a drastic decision without consulting Vargos, Caldigi, and Tubiel. Quickly, he consumed several witcher potions he had at hand, pushing himself to the brink of intoxication, if not slightly beyond, and marched towards the ruins with a battle cry that conveyed nothing but anguish and rage for his fallen friend.

This fierce battle cry, reminiscent of a mighty imperial eagle, drew more of the mercenaries who were protecting the place even faster, as they were already on their way due to the commotion caused by Zivor's confrontation. It was a deliberate move, and upon seeing them approach, Kemro could only smile and engage in combat, knowing that there was no tomorrow. He would die that night, but he would die in a grand manner. His final thoughts were for Zivor, who had shown him that the world could still be beautiful despite all the hardships, for Tubiel, who had taught him resilience, and for Putnam, who had always been there when he needed him. Putnam had been there from the beginning, when he was most vulnerable and everyone else considered a monster, except him.

As Kemro charged into battle, fueled by grief and consumed by his determination to avenge his fallen friend, his movements became a symphony of skill and fury. He unleashed a flurry of devastating strikes, his sword cutting through the air with deadly precision, also using boosted Signs like Aard, which he launched from his right arm prosthesis. The Signs caused many of his opponents to fall defeated, either unconscious or dead. The mercenaries and knights, taken aback by Kemro's ferocity, momentarily faltered in their attack, giving Vargos, Caldigi, and Tubiel the opportunity they needed to slip past the chaos and make their way towards their objective.

Kemro fought with such intensity that it seemed as though he was taking on the entire army single-handedly. His skill was formidable, and his resolve unshakable. Despite being outnumbered and outmatched, he held his ground for as long as he could. However, in the end, like Zivor before him, he was

overwhelmed by the sheer number of opponents he faced, compounded by the intoxicating effects of the potions he had consumed. He fell to the ground, surrounded by the lifeless bodies of his enemies, his final breath escaping in a defiant roar of victory.

Kemro's sacrifice was not in vain. His relentless onslaught had created a distraction, allowing Vargos, Caldigi, and Tubiel to slip past the chaos and infiltrate the ruins undetected. They moved swiftly and silently. Their mission to find Putnam burned with an even greater urgency now, fueled by the loss of the bard and the two Griffin witches.

As Vargos, Caldigi, and Tubiel delved deeper into the labyrinthine corridors of the ruins, the haunting evidence of Putnam's presence became increasingly apparent. The walls and floors were marred by sinister bloodstains, bearing witness to the unimaginable physical tortures he had endured at the merciless hands of Mimit. The signs of escape attempts were scattered throughout the corridors, telling a tale of desperate defiance against overwhelming odds. But as Vargos, Caldigi, and Tubiel meticulously investigated, a chilling truth emerged – most of these escape attempts had been cruel deceptions, artfully staged by Mimit himself. It was a psychological torment, an insidious game designed to mock Putnam's hope and resilience.

The trio couldn't help but feel a mix of fury and anguish as they pieced together the cruel puzzle laid out before them. The walls seemed to whisper the agonizing cries of the witcher, trapped within the confines of this malevolent maze. With each step they took, their determination grew, fueled by the need to bring an end to Putnam's suffering and extract retribution upon his tormentor.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, they rounded another corner and were greeted by a intense light ahead. A surge of hope coursed through their weary hearts. Could it be? Had they finally found him? Without hesitation, they quickened their pace, their steps fueled by a mix of anticipation and prayer, desperately hoping that they had arrived in time to save their friend and in Tubiel's case husband, from the clutches of despair.

And luck, at least for that moment, was fully on their side, as once they reached the source of such intense light, they finally found him after so much time. Upon seeing him, a whirlwind of emotions swept through them. There was the overwhelming joy of finally locating him and realizing he was still alive. Yet, this elation was tinged with deep sadness as they beheld his physical state.

The room in which Putnam was held captive for four long months remained unchanged, a stark and haunting space that had become a living nightmare. Its minimalist design, dominated by blinding white walls, provided an eerie backdrop to the horrors that had unfolded within its confines. Illuminated by artificial lights of magical origin, the room seemed to exist in a realm of its own, disconnected from the outside world.

Immaculate in its cleanliness, the room presented an unsettling contrast to the suffering endured by Putnam. Every surface was flawlessly maintained, devoid of any trace of the torment that had taken place there. The air itself felt sterile, as if it held the secrets of unspeakable acts and the lingering pain of the witcher's captivity.

However, the most harrowing change since Putnam's initial imprisonment was the repositioning of the white dimerite chains. No longer affixed to the walls, they now hung ominously from the ceiling, casting elongated shadows across the room. These chains, once symbols of confinement, now suspended him in a grotesque display, his right arm held captive and suspended, evoking a chilling resemblance to the lifeless carcass of an animal hanging in a butcher's shop.

Putnam's physical state was a testament to the cruel and relentless torture he had endured. Semi-naked and emaciated, his body bore the scars of countless agonizing moments inflicted upon him. Each new mark told a story of suffering, a testament to Mimit's sadistic ingenuity. His once piercing eyes, the windows to a soul that had faced countless trials, were now blinded by the aftermath of Mimit's latest experiments. Although temporary, the darkness that enveloped his vision added another layer of torment to his already shattered existence.

As Putnam hung there, his murmurs filled the sterile air, their incoherence echoing the fractured state of his mind. The torments he had endured had taken their toll, fragmenting his thoughts and leaving behind only fragments of a once sharp and coherent consciousness. The words that spilled from his lips were a haunting chorus, a dissonant melody of pain and confusion that further deepened the despair in the room.

Tubiel, in particular, grappled with a sense of guilt. She reproached herself for not having spoken to Putnam about the mage issue at the opportune moment. Her intention had been to shield Putnam from the burdens it entailed, not only for him but also for the rest of the Griffins. Yet, this well-meaning intention had backfired, leading to the unintended consequences that befell individuals like

Zivor, Kemro, and Jezkier—innocent souls who had paid dearly as a result.

It was a harrowing scene, a metaphorical harbinger of the trials that awaited The Golden Griffin. Tubiel, with tear-filled eyes and a voice filled with anguish, rushed desperately to unfasten her husband, beseeching Caldigi to lift her so she could reach. It took some time, using a hairpin she had at hand, but she finally succeeded. With agility, Vargos scooped up Putnam before he could collapse and gently laid him on the ground. Meanwhile, Tubiel, lowered by the man she regarded as her elder brother, cradled Putnam in her arms as best as she could, despite the difference in height.

It was an emotional reunion that, for a moment, seemed to end in sadness. At first, Putnam didn't respond; he remained trapped in his mind, murmuring nonsensical words. However, gradually, as the arms of the redhead touched his body, the witcher began to regain his senses. He recognized those arms, their shape, and the scars beneath the clothing that he had touched so many times in beautiful moments. During those four months of hell, they had faded away, almost like a dream. But now, they were there, providing tangible proof that they had been real. This realization overwhelmed Putnam, and he burst into tears as he finally recognized her presence and realized that she was truly there, not a figment of his imagination. He understood that she had come to rescue him, confirming that his hope had not been in vain and that there was a way out of it all.

And what about Sigurd? How did the young lad end up where he did? To learn about the red-haired boy with a hero's spirit, we must backtrack to Viesser for a moment. He and his "Uncle Fabio," as he affectionately referred to him, stayed at an inn in the city after reaching a dead-end alley, waiting for the next day to reunite with the others. However, the boy couldn't wait; he felt they had to take action and not remain idle. So, after they both appeared to have gone to sleep, Sigurd once again decided to run away. He had to find a way to get to Kasteel Saar, but he didn't know how. Fortunately (or rather, unfortunately), while wandering the city late at night, he overheard a group of mercenaries hired by Mimit discussing the location. They had been summoned as reinforcements after the team initiated the attack using a mega-scope. Seizing the opportunity, just as he had with the group in Kaer Seren, Sigurd snuck into one of the carriages heading there.

Returning to Vargos, Caldigi, Tubiel, and the rescued Putnam, they now faced the most challenging part of the entire affair: escape. Would they succeed?. Despite

the failed infiltration and the loss of three members, they still had a viable escape plan. After carefully analyzing the area, they discovered the ruins of what appeared to be an ancient sewer system, most likely constructed during the time of the Nilfgaardian Republic and probably used to dispose of the waste of the inhabitants of the ruins of what was once Kasteel Saar. This presented a potential route they could utilize. However, the pressing question remained: how could they reach it without being apprehended by Mimit? This task proved to be arduous, considering they were certain that the mage was already well aware of their presence, given the deaths and chaos they had caused.

In addition to the likelihood that the mage was already aware of their presence, they had to take into account Putnam's physical and mental state, especially his temporary blindness and difficulty walking after such a long time. This greatly impeded their progress. While Vargos or Caldigi could have carried him, they would not have been able to defend themselves adequately if the need arose. Furthermore, they had to locate an entrance to the sewer system within Kaseel Saar.

The beginning of the final stage of the mission to rescue Putnam seemed auspicious. They made their way towards what appeared to be the entrance to the sewer system, expecting an uneventful passage. However, their optimism quickly dissolved when they were confronted by an ominous sight. Mimit, adorned with a diabolical grin, awaited their arrival, ready to unleash his wrath upon them. The mage's eyes gleamed with malicious intent as he prepared to strike, determined to eliminate all four of them once and for all.

Yet, in a moment, Vargos leaped into action. With lightning speed, he positioned himself between the team and the incoming spell, invoking the protective power of the Quen Sign to shield them from harm. The magical barrier shimmered with resilience, repelling Mimit's deadly assault and safeguarding the group for a moment. In that crucial instant, Vargos cast a steadfast glance at Tubiel, Putnam, and Caldigi, his eyes filled with determination. He urged them to make their escape through the main entrance, assuring them that he would confront Mimit and buy them the time they needed. Trusting in Vargos, the trio hesitated only briefly before obeying his command.

So, with nothing more they could do, they continued their escape in a hurry, heading towards the main entrance, while Putnam's middle brother figure, fought the mage as if he were battling the worst of monsters. It was a fight worthy of legend, and although Vargos resisted as much as he could, he proved

to be no match for the mage. The mage unleashed his enchanted bow, shooting a relentless barrage of fiery arrows that Vargos couldn't deflect due to their incredible speed. The arrows found their mark, piercing Vargos' body and pinning him against a wall. As his life force waned, his body ignited in flames, and a fire quickly engulfed Kasteel Saar, spreading destruction throughout the ruins.

The fire raging through Kasteel Saar served as a grim confirmation of Vargos' demise, intensifying the urgency for Putnam, Tubiel and Caldigi to make their escape. However, their hopes of reaching safety were thwarted as they approached the main entrance, encountering an unexpected and unwelcome sight—Mimit's reinforcements, summoned in response to the attack. So, the Fox witcher, realizing the gravity of the situation, driven by a selfless determination, made a fateful decision. With resolute bravery, he resolved to confront Mimit's reinforcements head-on, providing an opportunity for Putnam and Tubiel to flee. Embraced by the encroaching flames, Caldigi engaged in a valiant struggle, his indomitable spirit matched only by the ferocity of the inferno surrounding him. It was not the enemy's blows that ultimately claimed his life, but the suffocating grip of the flames, sealing his fate within the blazing ruins.

The sacrifice of everyone ultimately served to rescue Putnam, and he and Tubiel managed to escape the place, greeted by the arid climate of Magne. This gave them hope that everything would turn out well in the end, and that the sacrifices made by all had been worthwhile. Although Sigurd's sudden appearance worried them both, it also brought them joy, as they thought it signaled the end of it all and that Mimit would be dead in the flames. But this was no fairy tale, and they would soon realize that.

And as if he were a specter, Mimit emerged from the shadows, standing ominously before them. No, it wasn't over. This would be the definitive moment where Tubiel's interference would come to an end. She had refused to face the consequences of her vigilantism, unwilling to sacrifice a loved one. Well, now she would pay an even greater price.

Putnam, who was by that time with his sight fully restored, was gripped by an overwhelming sense of terror, more profound than anything he had experienced before. Before either of them could react, Mimit unleashed a devastating spell upon Sigurd, reducing him to a mere heap of ashes right before their disbelieving eyes. The shock was unfathomable, leaving Putnam in a state of disbelief, and

Tubiel even less able to comprehend the unfolding tragedy. The weight of sorrow was so immense that Tubiel could barely mount a defense before Mimit, wielding the sword of a fallen mercenary, mercilessly pierced her heart.

Putnam, trapped by his weakened state, was utterly powerless to intervene. He could only bear witness to the heart-wrenching spectacle playing out before him, his feeble arms cradling the lifeless body of his beloved wife. Tears mixed with the wind-blown ashes of his fallen son that impact his face, mocking him, as a cruel reminder of his grief. With callous indifference, Mimit abandoned him, after leaving the scene using a portal, denying him even the solace of death. He was discarded as if he were an inconsequential pawn in the grand narrative, labeled as "another failed project" and nothing more.

If Putnam was already shattered from the four months of torture, this broke him further, witnessing how all the suffering he had endured had only resulted in the deaths of his loved ones in vain attempts to save him. And there he remained, alone in the cold night of the arid landscape of Magne, weeping and broken, watching as the future he once believed he could have, faded away before his eyes, never to return again.

"The Abyss" Pt.1 (June of 1280)

“Come on, Putnam. You have to live. Don't give up now.”

—Fabio Sachs

Upon awakening, Fabio was struck with extreme alarm when he discovered Sigurd's absence. He was well aware of the boy's independent nature, yet, he had hoped that after those four months with him and the rest of the team, he would have understood the gravity of the situation and stayed under his command.

On that day, the explorer didn't even bother with breakfast. Driven by the fear that something terrible may have happened to the young redhead, he began scouring the city in search of him. He searched tirelessly throughout Viesser for the entire morning and well into the afternoon, but Sigurd was nowhere to be found. Frustration and worry gnawed at him as he scoured every corner, questioning anyone who might have seen the young redhead. The weight of responsibility settled heavily on his shoulders, knowing that he had failed in his duty to keep Sigurd safe.

Exhausted and disheartened, Fabio decided to take a brief respite and grabbed a

quick lunch in a tavern. As he sat there, his mind preoccupied with thoughts of the missing boy, a dreadful realization slowly dawned on him. None of the team members assigned to the ruins had returned either. The gravity of the situation hit him like a thunderbolt, sending a surge of adrenaline through his veins.

Rising from his seat, Fabio abandoned his unfinished meal and leaped to his feet, his sense of urgency overriding his hunger. He dashed out of the tavern and sprinted toward the carriage they used, heading for Kasteel Saar. With every step, a mix of determination, fear, and hope coursed through him, as he prayed that he would find Sigurd and the rest of the team unharmed.

Upon his arrival, Fabio was confronted with a sight he could never have fathomed, not even in his darkest nightmares. Despite the initial signs, as he drew nearer, he attempted to brush them aside and maintain a positive outlook. The acrid stench of charred remains filled the air, but he convinced himself that it was merely the aftermath of a fierce battle, and that his friends would be there, encamped near the ruins, recuperating from their injuries.

However, cruelly mirroring Putnam's four months of torment, reality dealt a devastating blow to Fabio's optimism. With each passing moment, his hope dissolved like smoke, swiftly replaced by the chilling truth that unfolded before his eyes—a scene of unspeakable horror and tragedy. The ruins had endured a devastating fire, leaving them as black as coal, and the descending evening only heightened the grimness of the scene. The sight struck him, but he still tried to cling to his optimism. It was only when he started scanning the surroundings and drawing closer that he saw the truth. The area was littered with corpses—some untouched by the flames, remnants of previous battles, he presumed, while others lay charred, likely victims of a soft version of powerful Signs like Igni. Neither Sigurd nor his companions were anywhere to be found. Dreadful thoughts flooded Fabio's mind, and without a second thought, he began searching for them.

As each minute passed, confirming more of his fears, Fabio felt overwhelmed by grief. Amidst the charred ruins, he discovered the medallions once worn by Kemro, Zivor, Vargos, and Caldigi. Still, there was no sign of Sigurd, leading Fabio to presume that he had also perished in the fire (a thought that proved to be pretty accurate). Silent tears streamed down Fabio's face as he mourned the loss of the people whom he had come to appreciate during their four months together.

His thoughts immediately turned to Putnam. All they had endured, all the sacrifices they had made, had been for the witcher. Was he still alive? Would Fabio be forced to mourn the loss of his best friend as well? Fueled by this thought, Fabio frantically searched the area, his mind filled with desperation. It wasn't until he was returning to the carriage, frustrated and resigned to the idea that Putnam was gone, that he noticed a faint trace of familiarity in one of the bodies. It was Putnam, tightly embracing Tubiel with an unwavering grip born out of immense pain.

Overwhelmed with relief, Fabio rushed to check if they were still alive, even if only barely. He first attended to Tubiel, but the sight of the dried blood surrounding them and her visible wound shattered his hopes. Silently, Fabio shed more tears, mourning both the affection he held for her and the regret that their journey had ended in such tragedy. Turning his attention to Putnam, he fervently prayed that he would not have to endure another loss. Miraculously, his prayers were answered as the weakened witcher clung to life on the precipice of death. Fabio let out a sigh of relief, summoning every ounce of strength he had left, and with a heavy heart, he carefully lifted the lifeless body of Tubiel and the fragile form of Putnam, determined to remove them from this horrific place. It was the least he could do.

After that, Putnam's recovery and his place in history would come. A physical recovery that wouldn't take long, and a mental one that would take so long to complete that it would shape his life and destiny forever.

"Recovering Broken Wings" (Putnam's physical recovery)

After Putnam was rescued by Fabio, he was swiftly taken to Magne, the capital city that shared the same name as the province. Specifically, he was brought to the Oswa household, the in-laws of Fabio, where Erin, Fabio's wife, had been raised after their family's departure from Kovir. Saving Putnam's life was of utmost urgency, with Kaer Seren being too distant to provide immediate help. Additionally, it was equally important to ensure Tubiel received a dignified funeral.

Although Fabio's in-laws could be strict at times, their actions were driven by their concern for their daughter's well-being, particularly due to her visual impairment. Nevertheless, they were good-hearted people, albeit with their idiosyncrasies. Interestingly, Erin happened to be visiting her parents when Fabio arrived with Putnam and Tubiel. Initially hesitant to welcome a mutant like

Putnam into their home and devote themselves to saving his life, Erin's deep fascination with witchers and her persistent requests eventually convinced her parents to relent. In the end, they embraced Putnam as part of their family, going above and beyond to save his life.

Erin, on her part, was more than captivated. Putnam was the first witcher she had ever encountered in person! Fabio had previously shared stories about him, and he had even offered to take Erin to Kaer Seren to meet several other witchers (although circumstances prevented this). But now, she could finally experience him—not just as a distant tale, but to touch him, to hear him speak when he awakened. In those initial days, Fabio couldn't help but feel a hint of jealousy as he witnessed his wife dedicating so much of her time to Putnam, even if it was solely to keep a watchful ear on him.

After being in a terrible state, Putnam took several days to recover, precisely one week since Fabio had arrived at his in-laws' home. Finally awakening on June 10, 1280, he was still in a dire condition but significantly improved due to the care he had received. He remained emaciated and experienced body pains resulting from malnutrition and the physical torture he had endured during his captivity. Nevertheless, he was alive, and with each passing day, he regained more abilities and strength. Meanwhile, during Putnam's coma, Fabio took it upon himself to prepare Tubiel for the funeral, ensuring that the body was in the best possible condition for when the witcher would be back on his feet.

The first few days after awakening were a grueling experience for the witcher. He not only had to cope with the physical toll his ordeal had taken on his body but also wrestled with profound mental and emotional challenges. As mentioned earlier, the recovery of his psyche would prove to be a lengthy and arduous journey, as the remarkable mutations that endowed him with superhuman abilities did not extend to healing his inner wounds.

Upon regaining consciousness, there was a lingering sense of disbelief, as if everything he had endured had been nothing more than a haunting nightmare. The surreal nature of his surroundings in an unfamiliar house, even amidst the comforting presence of familiar faces like Fabio's, only served to amplify this uncertainty. Yet, it was the sight of his wife's lifeless body that jolted him back into the painful reality. The loss of Tubiel, their cherished adopted son, his dearest "middle brother," and his closest friends became painfully evident—voids that would forever remain unfilled.

The overwhelming guilt he felt lingered with him long after his physical recovery, as if both he and the guilt had become intertwined as one. During these days, he tried to distract himself by engaging in conversations with Erin, recounting stories of witches, the Griffin School to which he belonged, and the rigorous training he had undergone. Though painful most of the time, it served as a way to remember the accomplishments of those who had sacrificed themselves for him and what he had achieved himself. In a way, he tried to convince himself that this wound, too, would eventually heal, just like the wounds inflicted by monsters. However, he would soon learn that the path to healing was not as straightforward as he had hoped.

Erin, being a devoted witcher admirer, listened attentively, asked questions, and made notes in a writing system she had created called Braille. When Putnam regained the ability to walk, the three of them, Fabio, Erin and him, would take walks together in the garden of the house, finding solace in the beauty of nature and the comfort of each other's presence.

However, at the end of each conversation, and every walk, his mind would invariably return to the same thoughts, with his Survivor's Guilt growing stronger each day: "If only," "If I had been able to," "If I had escaped." The constant rehashing of these thoughts gnawed at his soul, tormenting him with the endless possibilities of what could have been, of the choices he could have made differently. The weight of his perceived failures bore heavily on his heart, a burden that seemed insurmountable.

The nights were not any better; in fact, they were worse. During the day, at least, as his body gradually returned to normal, he could occupy himself with new tasks and repay Fabio and his in-laws for saving his life and arranging a dignified funeral for Tubiel. However, when darkness fell, a different reality unfolded—one fraught with nightmares, drenched in cold perspiration, consumed by agonizing screams, and plagued by a suffocating claustrophobia triggered by the haunting memories of his captivity.

Later on, in the closer future. In search of solace, he would seek refuge in the allure of hallucinogenic potions like Seagull, be it the Black or the White variety. The elixirs offered temporary respite, briefly lifting the veil of his pain and providing a fleeting sense of release. Alternatively, he sought solace in the arms of women, seeking solace in their bodies and attempting to drown out the echoes of his self-loathing.

However, the majority of these encounters ended abruptly, as a deep-seated belief in his own monstrosity consumed him. He saw himself as undeserving of affection, convinced that he was a wretched being whose touch only brought harm. This perception shattered connections and left a trail of broken hearts in his wake.

His journey would become a labyrinth of fragmented connections, his soul burdened by the weight of guilt and self-loathing. The scars, both visible and hidden, dictated his existence for some time, as he yearned for redemption and release from the prison of his own mind. It was only with the arrival of Jolanta and Marina in his life that things began to change, albeit very gradually.

Tubiel's Funeral (June 15, 1280)

"As we gather here today, we are reminded of the profound loss we have suffered, bidding farewell to our beloved Lioness of Brenna. She was more than just a wife and a companion to Putnam. Tubiel was good friend, a force of nature, a fierce protector, and a loving soul who touched the lives of all who had the privilege of knowing her."

—Fabio Sachs' speech at the funeral of Tubiel of Brenna.

The funeral of the Lioness of Brenna marked a poignant and emotionally challenging moment in the early stages of Putnam's "new life." The weight of grief and loss hung heavy in the air as they gathered in the tranquil setting of the Oswa family's garden at dusk on June 15, 1280. It was a solemn occasion, where the simplicity of the ceremony allowed the profound significance of their collective sorrow to be felt.

Fabio and Erin, understanding the depth of Putnam's connection to his beloved wife, took on the responsibility of organizing the funeral. They meticulously planned each aspect, ensuring that it reflected the dignity and respect that the Lioness of Brenna deserved.

Putnam, grappling with a whirlwind of emotions, provided occasional assistance, albeit with great effort. The psychological toll he had endured made each step forward a daunting task. Yet, he recognized the importance of participating in honoring his wife's memory and finding some type of closure amidst the sea of unanswered questions and lingering regrets.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting a gentle glow over the gathering, the ceremony began. Fabio's words resonated with a bittersweet blend of sadness and reverence, recounting the remarkable qualities and enduring spirit

of the Lioness. Putnam attempted to speak, but his voice cracked with such intensity that he found himself unable to utter a single word. Erin, aware that she had never gotten to know Tubiel, remained respectfully reserved.

The three of them, the sole attendees of the funeral, fell into a contemplative silence. It was a moment of reflection, broken only by Putnam's tears that burst forth with increasing force. Trying to contain them, he steeled himself for the final step.

A funeral pyre had been prepared, following the [funeral rites of the witchers](#), specifically those of the School of the Cat. With great effort, Putnam conjured a gentle Igni Sign to light the pyre, for fire had become a difficult reminder for him after the tragedy he had endured. Just before the flames engulfed the pyre, Putnam, as if afraid of forgetting her, retrieved Tubiel's medallion, clutching it tightly as a constant reminder of her presence.

In that moment, as the fire crackled and cast dancing shadows, Putnam bid his beloved Lioness farewell, offering her one final tribute. He vowed to carry her memory within him always, symbolized by the medallion, a connection that would remain unbroken.

And so, amidst the flickering flames and the weight of grief, the funeral of the Lioness of Brenna came to a close, leaving Putnam to navigate the depths of his sorrow and embark on the challenging path of healing, forever carrying the indelible mark of his love for Tubiel.

Discussion with Fabio / Separation and Pursuit of Revenge (June 20, 1280)

In the days leading up to Tubiel's funeral, Fabio didn't mention anything to Putnam about the four months they had spent searching for him until they finally found him. Fabio feared that, due to Putnam's mental, emotional, and physical state, he might engage in reckless behavior. He had promised Tubiel that if anything happened to her, he would take care of the witcher, a promise he had fulfilled more than adequately until then.

It wasn't until Tubiel's body was consumed by fire and her ashes settled, which Putnam collected to scatter in Brenna, the place his deceased wife would have wanted them, that Putnam became relatively stable in all aspects. However, this stability was merely a facade, as he had learned to appear better regarding his psyche to not worry Fabio and Erin more. It was during this time that Fabio began to open up and discuss everything with him. These conversations occurred at different moments over the course of the five days following the

Lioness of Brenna's departure beyond the veil.

It is worth mentioning that what would happen next was practically inevitable. The effort to lift Putnam up again and help him emerge from the abyss into which he had fallen had been a great sacrifice, and Fabio, being as human as everyone else, paid the price for it. This was especially true due to the increasing closeness between Putnam and Erin, which heightened the mild jealousy that had surfaced during Putnam's coma (unfounded jealousy, it must be said, as despite Putnam acquiring a reputation as a womanizer in the future, he respected his friend and his wife as much as anyone, and Erin was deeply in love with Fabio). Eventually, Putnam gave Erin permission to touch his face with her hands and "map" it, allowing her to get a better idea of whom she was talking to. And, of course, Erin's comments about how beautiful Putnam was, both physically and internally (especially internally, as the redhead tended to describe people more by their voices and personalities), didn't help. However, there was another factor to add to this, which would contribute to the separation of the two friends for a year and a half.

And this was, of course, Sigurd. At first, when Fabio began to talk to Putnam about how Sigurd ended up traveling with them and how they couldn't turn back because it would have taken them more time to rescue him, Putnam accepted it well. The only thing was that he wouldn't have scolded the boy as they did, and he would have taken a gentler approach. But he could understand why they did it, as their safety was at risk (and in the end, it was, as it turned out). What bothered him, and was the cause of the terrible argument they would end up having, along with a growing sense of "justice" for Tubiel's death that had been building up in the witcher as the days passed and his physical condition improved, and Fabio's unfounded jealousy, was the "mistake" that the future explorer made by falling asleep and "allowing" Sigurd to escape and commit the recklessness that would ultimately lead to the deaths of both him and Tubiel.

As they delved deeper into their discussions, emotions ran high, and the rift between Putnam and Fabio widened. The weight of Tubiel's loss, coupled with the unresolved jealousy and blame, intensified their disagreements. Putnam felt a growing need for justice and closure, and he struggled to reconcile the tragic events that had unfolded. The bond between the two friends, once unbreakable, strained under the weight of grief, resentment, and miscommunication.

Before bidding farewell to Fabio's in-laws' home, Fabio, despite his anger towards the witcher, decided to return the two swords: the Ofiri steel saber and

the silver sword to the witcher. These were the very weapons Tubiel had carefully placed in the carriage, anticipating a successful outcome that would warrant their return to Putnam. Given Tubiel's unfortunate departure from the world, it felt like a solemn duty to honor her memory by returning the cherished blades. Unspoken yet deeply understood, it was an act aligned with the wishes of the Lioness of Brenna herself.

Erin, silently observing the tense exchanges with a heavy heart, yearned to mend the rift between her beloved husband and dear friend. Though unable to intervene and reconcile them in that moment, she sought solace in assisting Putnam before his departure. Determined to lend her support, she mustered great effort to gather various Witcher materials from her extensive collection, with a primary focus on artifacts obtained from the renowned Griffin School. These particular items had once belonged to Kristov of White Orchard, their significance reaching far beyond their mere material existence.

Among the retrieved relics were the garments that Erin had carefully recovered from the fallen Witcher's possessions. Infused with memories and history, these clothes became a tangible connection to a lost comrade. Moreover, there was the striking white Griffin armor, its craftsmanship enhanced by the masterful modifications wrought by skilled dwarven hands. While seemingly a minor detail, the acquisition of this armor would soon prove to be far from inconsequential. The return of these swords and the infusion of Kristov's belongings into Putnam's journey would shape the impending events in profound ways.

Their separation, lasting for a year and a half, became a necessary respite for both of them to heal their wounds and find solace in their individual journeys. It was a painful chapter in their friendship, one marked by regret, longing, and a lingering hope for reconciliation. Little did they know that their paths would intersect again, and this would shape the history of The Continent forever.

"The Abyss" Pt.2 (D 'yaeb'l "The Irbis of Hengfors") [July - August of 1280]

“Love's game binds, both pleasure and pain, so wield your knife with care.”
—Hengforsian Saying

After the fight between Putnam and Fabio, along with their subsequent separation, the Golden Griffin entered its darkest, most complicated, and

intricate phase. It was a period driven by pain and vengeance, which, despite being sad and chaotic, would definitively shape the man he would become, as if it were the rebirth of a phoenix.

And all of this was not solely due to the presence of such good and significant women as Marina or Jolanta, who would play key roles in his slow healing process. No, it was also because of a woman who was equally complicated as he was, someone with whom he shared more than he would ever admit. We could say she was his "mirror reflection," D'yaeb'l. If he represented "gold," she was "obsidian," but even obsidian can shine with enough light, and gold can lose its original value with sufficient blows.

But before continuing, to understand more about the relationship between these two figures, we need more context. Let's begin with the irbis.

D'yaeb'l, like many members of the School of the Cat, dedicated herself to the craft of assassination. She excelled in her profession, and life was going well for her until two pivotal moments unfolded: the death of Kristov and the failed assassination attempt on King Foltest. These events would have far-reaching consequences, shaping the path for both D'yaeb'l and the Golden Griffin to intersect.

Let's begin by discussing Kristov. The witcher from the School of the Griffin, at some point before 1271, is believed to have met D'yaeb'l, who would later be nicknamed Irbis or the Snow Leopard of Hengfors by him. The exact timeframe of their encounter remains vague, speculated to have occurred prior to the events of the Kaer Seren avalanche.

It is believed that fate brought them together when Kristov stumbled upon D'yaeb'l, teetering on the brink of death after a treacherous encounter with a monster. In an act of heroism, Kristov rescued her from the clutches of the abyss, not only sparing her life but also igniting a profound change within her. He became her savior, not just from imminent death, but from the inner demons that tormented her soul.

D'yaeb'l's upbringing was far from ideal, having been raised within the confines of the School of the Cat as a woman under the tutelage of Brehen, the infamous Cat of Iello, she experienced a tumultuous and arduous journey. Yet, it was not only the physical ordeals that weighed heavily on D'yaeb'l's psyche. Rumors swirled about Brehen's malevolent treatment towards her, his insidious abuse

taking on many forms, including sexual, further deepening the scars etched upon her spirit.

As the truth about the abuses inflicted upon D'yaeb'l eventually came to light, the outrage within the Cat School reached a boiling point. The morally ambiguous Cats, who often treaded the line between right and wrong, were not immune to a sense of justice. The revelation of Brehen's transgressions, intertwined with the bloodshed of the infamous Iello massacre, became the catalyst that shattered the fragile equilibrium within the school. The collective condemnation of Brehen's actions, fueled by the atrocities committed against D'yaeb'l, led to his ultimate expulsion from the ranks of the Cats.

Interestingly, all of this was due to Kristov's intervention, who, after saving her life, not only became a close friend but also something more than that, a lover. He believed that the "twisted branches" of the Cats could find their way back to the right path. Kristov played a significant role in helping D'yaeb'l overcome many things and become a slightly better person despite the horrors she had experienced. He showed her the inner light she possessed and taught her that there was another path besides returning the same cruelty that the world had inflicted upon her. In short, he aimed to restore the humanity she had once had but lost. Unfortunately, fate can be cruel at times, and D'yaeb'l would ultimately lose Kristov forever when he was defeated and killed by the bounty hunter Leo Bonhart, plunging her back into darkness. The only memento that would remain for her to hold onto that humanity Kristov had shown her existed within herself would be a sword he had commissioned, which would bear her name, D'yaeb'l. It would be in that darkness, in the deepest abyss, where she and Putnam would meet each other's gaze for the first time.

The other crucial moment we need to explore is the assassination attempt on King Foltest. Long before Letho of Gulet succeeded in taking the monarch's life, there were other attempts, and D'yaeb'l was responsible for one of them. Paid by an anonymous contractor, she endeavored to carry out the mission but ultimately failed, miscalculating her plan and losing the sword Kristov had gifted her in the process. She barely escaped, but this failure haunted her at desperate levels. It drove her to travel far and wide, relentlessly seeking to recover the sword through any means possible. Deep down in her subconscious, there was a terrifying fear that losing the sword would lead her to plunge into a darkness even greater than her initial descent, with no hope of return.

The sword changed hands multiple times, passing through the possession of

legendary figures like Geralt of Rivia, and the sorcerer Azar Javed. Though it eventually found its way back to its rightful owner, the journey to achieve that objective was long and arduous. Along the way, D'yaebel crossed paths with the Golden Griffin, and both mutually influenced each other in their essence and their destinies, although neither of them could initially fathom the depth of their connection.

And with that said, in order to discuss their first encounter properly, we must return to Putnam. The witcher, aside from drowning his sorrows with Black Gull or White Gull and seeking solace in the arms of women whenever the opportunity arose, embarked on a mission fueled by the information provided by Fabio. He was determined to "*finish what Tubiel had started*" and bring about the downfall of the notorious criminal organization known as the Gardunnia. And if, by chance, he could find Mimit, who had vanished from the face of the earth, and kill him, all the better (unfortunately, this would not happen until much later). This organization, once aligned with the Mimit sect, was responsible, by providing the mage with the information he needed to do what he did, for the deaths of Tubiel, their adopted son, and the fallen Griffins and Fox. Despite the diminished threat of the sect (at that time extinct, although it would eventually be rebuilt), the Gardunnia remained a formidable force, capable of forging alliances and financing even more treacherous mages.

This quest for revenge undertaken by the once knightly Golden Griffin would bring D'yaebel into Putnam's path. After the Snow Leopard started working for the organization in exchange for a substantial sum of money and the sword she desperately wanted to recover, her objective was clear: to kill Putnam, who had become a threat to them. The Golden Griffin had transformed into a wild beast, ruthlessly exterminating entire criminal gangs and other groups under the Gardunnia's control, as well as its members, in gruesome ways (something that secretly delighted D'yaebel, although this would later lead Putnam to undergo the Trial of the Sword). With six out of the twenty council members of this secretive organization eliminated, which held all criminal activities in the Northern Realms and Nilfgaard under its umbrella, the time finally came for them to meet on a hot August night that year.

The Irbis spent a long month studying his movements, learning his patterns, and investigating him. She was undoubtedly impressed, particularly by the creativity displayed in his killings. Of note was the one he carried out against [Imke](#), a prostitute who happened to be the lover of one of the members of the

Gardunnia, Gudrun. Putnam sent Gudrun a grisly message by presenting Imke's severed head, artfully decorated like a birthday cake, accompanied by a chilling note proclaiming that Gudrun would be the next to meet his blade. It was thanks to this gruesome act that D'yaeb'l would finally be able to track him down after such a prolonged pursuit.

D'yaeb'l, after all that time, prepared her move, believing that she would kill Putnam, collect the reward, reclaim the sword, and finally find peace after enduring so much. However, life, destiny, or whichever force governs the lives of men and women had a surprise in store for her, one that neither she nor the now wild Golden Griffin could have anticipated. The intricately devised plan, perfected through meticulous observation of the young witcher as if he were her own shadow, unfolded smoothly, at least in its initial stages. Taking advantage of Putnam's predictable routine of consuming Black Gull or White Gull to cope with his pain or insomnia, D'yaeb'l stealthily infiltrated his room, gliding through the shadows with silent determination, ready to catch him off guard. Engaging in a twisted dance of amusement and danger, she played her part, savoring the exhilaration of the moment, and approached Putnam from behind as he made his way to the bed, poised to deliver the fatal blow that would end his life.

The first three steps of the plan executed flawlessly. D'yaeb'l skillfully manipulated the situation, evoking a mix of fear and desire in Putnam. Their conversation and playful banter escalated, building a tension that hung heavily in the air. However, just as D'yaeb'l prepared to execute the final act and slit Putnam's throat with her dagger, an unexpected and unsettling event disrupted the grim tableau.

Putnam, heavily under the influence of the Black Gull potion, erupted into laughter—an eerie, unsettling sound that reverberated through the room. The unexpected outburst caught D'yaeb'l off guard, momentarily freezing her in confusion and uncertainty. What was he finding so amusing? He stood on the brink of death, about to meet his end in a manner unworthy of a witcher from his school, and yet he found amusement in the situation.

As the echoes of Putnam's unsettling laughter subsided, a charged atmosphere hung between D'yaeb'l and him. Their eyes locked, filled with a mixture of fury, desire, and something else, something deeper that defied explanation. In that moment, the boundary between adversaries blurred, and a primal instinct took hold of them both.

Their clash transitioned seamlessly from combat to a twisted dance of passion and aggression. Each strike became an intimate caress, and their bodies moved with a fierce and intoxicating rhythm. The lines between pain and pleasure became indistinguishable, as the intensity of their fight fueled an unyielding desire that coursed through their veins.

In the heat of the moment, every one of Putnam's movements exuded the essence of Kristov—his gestures, his gaze, his disheveled and tangled brown hair that once recently was bleached blonde hair because of the southern sun. D'yaebel, likewise, became the vessel for Tubiel's essence, momentarily embracing the force of nature that was the "Lioness of Brenna."

Their primal connection transcended mere physicality, delving into a realm where desire and violence coexisted. It was an all-consuming union, where their bodies and souls intertwined, succumbing to the irresistible force that drew them together. They became entangled in a whirlwind of pleasure and pain, losing themselves in a maelstrom of conflicting emotions that defied reason.

In that momentary respite, D'yaebel, momentarily diverted from her mission, and Putnam, momentarily liberated from his quest for vengeance, found solace and an unexpected connection. The encounter, born from chaos and their intertwined destinies, held profound significance that surpassed their original intentions. It was a profound and transformative experience, where their paths converged in a dance of passion and darkness.

Little did they know that this encounter would alter the course of their fates, entwining them in a web of complicated emotions and unforeseen consequences. As their bodies and desires merged, they became inexorably bound together, their destinies intertwined in ways they could not yet comprehend.

The Fate of the Gardunnia

After that animalistic encounter, which arose from many factors but, above all, the pain of loss and the guilt—she for not having saved Kristov, and he for not having saved Tubiel—D'yaebel and Putnam would go their separate ways (although life would eventually make them meet again and again, as if they were two opposite poles of magnets). Not without the Cat Witcheress, in an impulse of humanity she had not felt in years, helping Putnam to escape from the place. For she had agreed to meet with several members of the Gardunnia the next day to

present them with proof that she had accomplished her objective and slain the Golden Griffin, in the same inn where their wild night together had taken place instead of Putnam's murder. However, failing to do so, and driven by the aforementioned impulse of humanity, likely born from the feelings that blossomed that night, she opted to spare Putnam's life and take on his revenge by eliminating these powerful criminal leaders. Something to which Putnam, although worried, did not oppose, as if on the morning after, they understood each other perfectly, as if they had known each other all their lives, despite their acquaintance lasting only a couple of hours.

And so, D'yaebel, once again foregoing the chance to reclaim the lost sword, continued her journey, unaware of the profound transformation that awaited her.

"The Light" (Jolanta of Brunwich) [September 1280 - early February 1281]

Although all the women who crossed paths with the Golden Griffin held their significance to a greater or lesser extent, influencing who he became, there is one who stood out above the rest, only equaled in importance, perhaps, by Tubiel of Brenna. And that is none other than Jolanta of Brunwich, later known as *Jolanta "The Nightingale"*, *The Mother of Cranes*, or *Saint Jolanta*, depending on which Fabiolan you ask. But at that time, she was more commonly known simply as Jolanta, *Jolanta "The Liliger"*, or "*Jolanta the Liliger of Novigrad*".

These two nicknames were inherited from what could be considered her father.

Jolanta was a woman vastly distinct from D'yaebel, Dragonfly or even Tubiel, so when the moment arrived for her and Putnam to intersect their paths, it presented a considerable challenge for the Golden Griffin, given his mental state.

But before we continue, just like with D'yaebel, we need some context. The woman who would become the co-author of the moral code that witchers would follow from the 14th century onwards, the co-leader of the School of the Crane and one of the last fully mutated cats before the fall of Dyn Marv in 1269, had a relatively normal childhood and training, but quite peculiar compared to her counterparts in the caravan for a simple reason.

Saved by the witcher Pardus of Korath when she was just a five-year-old child from her abusive family, Jolanta was taken away from that environment and brought to Dyn Marv, where she would be trained and transformed into a

witcheress, as was customary. The difference compared to others was that during the process, Pardus grew fond of the girl and eventually adopted her as his own daughter, caring for her, protecting her, and teaching her with all the love of a father, and even more so (unlike D'yaebł and Brehen). This allowed young Jolanta, despite being in such a harsh environment like the School of the Cat, to grow relatively healthy and with the moral values that Pardus instilled in her (although Putnam never liked them much, at least during that time, due to his prejudices against the School of the Cat. Ironically, a significant part of Putnam's life was connected to the Cats or their variants, whether it was the Lynxes, the Lions, and later on, the Tigers), in addition to being quite competent in her profession.

In a way, Jolanta bore similarities to Tubiel in more than one sense, yet, as already mentioned, she was also very distinct. In fact, the two women, along with Mozeħ of Verden, became acquainted (as Tubiel and Jolanta shared training time together in the caravan, while Mozeħ was older) and developed a friendship, considering themselves as sisters. Tubiel and Jolanta were akin to younger sisters, while Mozeħ assumed the role of the older sister.

It is worth mentioning that before Putnam and Jolanta met in person, they had already heard of each other. Tubiel had spoken to Putnam about her "sisters" on occasion, and Vargos had mentioned his "brothers" to Jolanta (referring to Coën and Putnam). Prior to her complicated relationship with Putnam (due to the actions of the Golden Griffin, it must be said, and his insistence on wanting to "protect" her stemming from the traumas left by Tubiel's death and later on, others), Jolanta had been involved with another witcher from the School of the Griffin, the already mentioned Putnam's "brother" Vargos. It was a brief yet intense relationship that ended when Vargos decided to leave her for unknown reasons.

So, when the future parents of the first witchers of the School of the Crane finally met in person in September 1280, after Putnam's return from Nilfgaardian territory, they instantly recognized each other. Jolanta identified Putnam by his striking heterochromatic eyes, and Putnam recognized Jolanta by her hair dyed in unconventional colors (as Jolanta was a natural redhead), a practice that "the Mother of Cranes" would maintain for many years to come.

Their previous romances added a layer of complexity to their relationship. The Golden Griffin's actions, driven by his desire to protect Jolanta because of his

own unresolved traumas, created a unique dynamic between them. Their encounters were marked by tension, mixed emotions, and a delicate balance of trust and skepticism that would not yield to stability until life brought them back together again at the end of the 14th century.

First stage of the relationship (September - December 1280)

The first stage of the relationship between Putnam and Jolanta took place from September 1280 to December of the same year, and it developed in a fairly standard manner considering the circumstances. In a short amount of time, influenced in part by the weight of their past relationships (especially for Putnam, as having another Cat by his side reminded him of the good times when he traveled with Tubiel), they became friends and decided to travel together, despite Jolanta's initial reluctance (due to Vargos' unexplained abandonment). Putnam managed to convince her with his natural charisma, telling her that, given the circumstances, they would be better off together.

And to some extent, the Golden Griffin was right. As they traveled together, their relationship evolved from a simple friendship with a healthy rivalry to something more by the end of the month of October. However, this change, although ultimately beneficial for the world, brought many headaches for both of them, particularly for Jolanta. Being the first person Putnam attempted to pursue a more serious relationship with after Tubiel's death, "the Liliger" had to endure the weight of all the burdens that plagued the witcher.

During their time together, they faced numerous challenges and notable events. They confronted a group of Corpus Custodia that had taken over the city of Iello and dealt with a cult that had kidnapped a mage in the neighboring city of Emele. The cult had influential members within the local government and businesses, making their task even more difficult. It was in Emele where their first major disagreement arose, leading to a duel between them and resulting in Putnam acquiring his famous lip scar. The disagreement stemmed from Jolanta's desire to kill the mage, while Putnam, in contrast, wanted to spare his life and bring him to justice.

These events were just a few among the many that unfolded until the arrival of winter that year. Throughout their journey, they faced trials and tested their bond, solidifying their partnership and deepening their connection. However, it wasn't until the winter of that year that a significant turning point occurred.

Jolanta, understanding the circumstances and knowing that Putnam would not

be able to make it to Kaer Seren in time, offered him to spend the winter with her at her home in Novigrad. Putnam accepted her invitation, not only because of his inability to arrive on time but also due to the guilt he carried for being the perceived "cause" of the death of three Griffins. He was afraid of returning to the keep and facing the exaggerated consequences he believed would befall him. It was during this winter together that their relationship truly deepened, leaving a lasting impact.

Winter with Jolanta (December 1280 - early February 1281)

The winter that Jolanta and Putnam spent together in Novigrad was, overall, a pleasant one, and as previously mentioned, it served to deepen their relationship.

Jolanta, like many other members of the School of the Cat, had to fend for herself and find a place to spend the winter after the caravan disbanded. Fortunately, she was resourceful, and much like her "sister" in Brenna, she managed to secure a home relatively quickly. Specifically, she obtained a comfortable house in the Free City. Although she didn't use the home frequently throughout the year, she was able to maintain ownership with the money she earned from various contracts, whether they involved monsters or criminals (especially the latter). In fact, when she did travel, it was primarily to ensure she wouldn't lose her winter refuge. Over the years, she had transformed it into a true home with its own unique character.

During that time, Putnam's traumas became the primary source of problems. His overwhelming sense of responsibility drove him to disappear for hours, venturing into the treacherous sewers of Novigrad to undertake perilous contracts, hunting down wererats and other formidable monsters. Jolanta couldn't help but worry as she witnessed the toll it took on him when he returned home, battered and weary. Otherwise, they were a normal couple, and they did normal couple things.

These contracts were not solely motivated by Putnam's guilt for Jolanta shouldering most of the expenses during that winter. They also stemmed from his subconscious desire to find a noble death in battle, following the tragic losses of Tubiel and Sigurd. This deep-rooted longing manifested into a conscious decision when he attempted to end his own life by poisoning himself with Black Seagull. However, it was Jolanta's timely intervention that saved him from his

self-destructive path.

Yet, despite Jolanta's unwavering support and their deepening connection, the weight of Putnam's traumas grew increasingly overwhelming. The haunting nightmares that plagued his sleep, the jarring awakenings in the dead of night, and the cold sweats that drenched his body—all contributed to the heavy burden he carried within.

As the months passed, Putnam's internal struggles intensified. He couldn't shake the feeling that he was dragging Jolanta down with him, burdening her with the weight of his tormented soul. He believed he didn't deserve her love, her unwavering support, or the affection she so willingly bestowed upon him. The approach of February 1281 only served to amplify his self-doubt and intensify his guilt.

In the quiet solitude of his contemplation, Putnam made the agonizing decision to distance himself from Jolanta. With a heavy heart, he penned a heartfelt letter, pouring out his gratitude for her presence in his life and expressing deep remorse for the pain he believed he had caused her. Alongside the letter, he left a bag of coins as a token of appreciation, hoping it would in some small way compensate for the turmoil he believed he had inflicted upon her.

In his mind, he saw no other path but to release Jolanta from the burdensome ties that bound them. He couldn't bear the thought of dragging her further into the depths of his own inner turmoil. His sense of unworthiness clouded his judgment, blinding him to the profound impact they had on each other's lives.

My Dearest Jolanta,

As I sit here, trying to put my thoughts into words, I find myself overwhelmed by the conflicting emotions that swirl within me. Our time together has been a bittersweet symphony of joy and pain, love and anguish. It is with a heavy heart that I now find myself grappling with an inner turmoil that eludes explanation.

You, my beloved Jolanta, have been a guiding light in the midst of my darkness. Your unwavering presence has brought solace to my troubled soul, filling the void that once consumed me. But as the days pass, I can't help but question whether I am worthy of the happiness you offer, whether I am deserving of the love that flows so freely from your heart.

In the depths of my being, there lies a profound sadness, a heaviness that threatens to engulf us both. It is a burden that I bear alone, unable to fully

articulate the depths of my pain. I fear that my struggles have cast a shadow upon our love, leaving you questioning the very essence of who I am.

I long for you to be free from the weight of my sorrows, to find joy in a life unburdened by the ghosts that haunt me. It is a selfless act, born out of a desire to protect you from the tempest that rages within. And so, I have made the heart-wrenching decision to step aside, to release you from the chains that bind us.

In this letter, I leave behind a small token, a humble gesture to express my gratitude for the love and support you have bestowed upon me. Alongside my words, you will find a bag of coins, a symbolic offering for the trouble that my presence may have caused. It is a meager offering, an attempt to convey the magnitude of my remorse. I hope that it may, in some small way, ease the confusion and heartache that surely accompany these words.

Jolanta, my love for you knows no bounds. The memories we have shared, the moments of tenderness and connection, will forever be etched upon my soul. But now, I implore you to seek a path untethered to my troubles, to find the happiness and fulfillment that you deserve.

Please, forgive me for the confusion and the uncertainty that this letter may bring. My intentions are muddled, my words inadequate to convey the depth of my emotions. Know that I cherish you, and it is with a heavy heart that I bid you farewell.

With all my love,

Putnam

The chaos of Aldesberg (March 1281)

"Quit playing the hero, Putnam!. You ain't gonna fix everything!"

—D'yaeb! to Putnam during their duel in Aldesberg

After parting ways with Jolanta and enduring a somewhat challenging February, Putnam eagerly welcomed the arrival of spring and continued his journey on The Path, seeking new contracts. He set his sights on the kingdom of Lyria and Rivia, enticed by rumors of potential work. Little did he know that an unexpected surprise awaited him on his travels.

As Putnam ventured southward and made his way through the city of Aldersberg, fate intervened in the form of the city's mayor. The mayor approached him, beseeching his assistance in dealing with a perplexing

dilemma. It appeared that a mysterious figure had been wreaking havoc and causing destruction throughout the city, leaving its inhabitants in a state of fear and despair, including the mayor himself, whose own daughter had disappeared. Convinced that only a witcher possessed the skills to confront this enigma, the mayor turned to Putnam for aid. Intrigued by the intrigue surrounding the situation, Putnam willingly accepted the task and embarked on a quest to unmask the culprit.

As Putnam delved deeper into his investigation, it became apparent that the enigmatic figure causing havoc in Aldersberg was none other than D'yaeb'l herself. Following that assassination attempt turned in the a passionnal and animalistic encounter, D'yaeb'l had once again missed the opportunity to reclaim the sword that Kristov gave her. Undeterred, she continued her relentless pursuit, tracing the sword's trail all the way to Aldersberg, firmly convinced that the mayor possessed it.

D'yaeb'l initially attempted a peaceful resolution, seeking to negotiate the purchase of the sword from the mayor, as stealing it proved to be a formidable challenge due to the extensive security measures in place. However, the mayor adamantly refused to sell the precious artifact. Faced with this impasse, D'yaeb'l resorted to drastic measures and made the audacious decision to kidnap the mayor's daughter, using her as leverage to exert pressure and force the mayor's hand.

The situation had escalated over several days, with D'yaeb'l resorting to increasingly destructive acts that bordered on terrorism, all in an effort to coerce the mayor into surrendering the sword. The chaos that ensued was a clear message to Putnam, underscoring the urgency of the situation and D'yaeb'l's determination to reclaim what she believed was rightfully hers.

Aware of D'yaeb'l's cunning and unpredictable nature, Putnam prepared himself for the inevitable confrontation that awaited him. The stakes were heightened by the fact that the mayor's daughter was now in D'yaeb'l's custody, amplifying the pressure on Putnam to swiftly resolve the situation.

Putnam found himself amidst a city gripped by fear and uncertainty. The escalating acts of destruction perpetrated by D'yaeb'l had pushed Aldersberg to the edge, and its residents were desperate for a resolution. Putnam understood the gravity of the task at hand and recognized the delicate balance between negotiation and force that he would need to employ.

D'yaeb'l, as it was obvious, became aware of Putnam's presence in the city, which stirred conflicting emotions within her for a fleeting moment. However, she swiftly pushed them aside. She had to retrieve the only memento of the only person who had seen humanity and kindness in her, and she wouldn't allow the meddling Golden Griffin to disrupt her plans.

As Putnam approached the location where D'yaeb'l was said to be hiding, finally having found it after a careful investigation, he was met with fierce resistance. The streets were filled with chaos and the sound of clashing weapons. D'yaeb'l had convinced the poor and non-humans of the city to join her cause, promising them a chance to sack the mayor's house and claim his riches. The makeshift army of D'yaeb'l fought fiercely, their desperation evident as they clashed with Putnam.

In the midst of the intense battle, Putnam couldn't help but feel a profound sadness for the innocent lives caught in the middle of this conflict. He knew that D'yaeb'l's desperation for the sword drove her actions, but he couldn't stand by and let her harm any more innocent people. With each opponent he faced, Putnam sought to incapacitate rather than kill. He skillfully knocked out those who stood in his way, doing his best to minimize collateral damage and protect the lives of the innocent.

As he fought his way through the chaotic scene, Putnam remained resolute. He understood the stakes and the significance of the sword, but in this case, the greater good mattered more than the sword. And yes, Putnam knew of the significance of the sword to D'yaeb'l. How? Well, through Jolanta, who, during their time together, in those sleepless winter nights, that the witcher would wake up tormented by all that he had come to experience, had told him D'yaeb'l's story as an example of what not to do — of clinging to the past and not looking to the future. Ironically, this new encounter between the Golden Griffin and the Irbis would mark a small step in Putnam's journey of letting go, a process that, although slow, would prove effective. He would come to see in D'yaeb'l and her attitude what he did not want to become.

Finally, Putnam reached the location where D'yaeb'l was said to be hiding. She had taken refuge in an abandoned warehouse, where she held the mayor's daughter as a hostage. Putnam knew that he had to act quickly to save the girl and put an end to D'yaeb'l's madness. Aware of the delicate situation, Putnam cautiously approached, his hand gripping the hilt of his steel saber. He knew that time was of the essence, both for the captive girl and to prevent further chaos

from unfolding in the city.

With a mix of determination and caution, Putnam tried to negotiate with D'yaeb'l, hoping to find a peaceful resolution. To his surprise, D'yaeb'l momentarily considered his offer, her gaze lingering on the armor he wore—the same armor that had once belonged to Kristov. In that moment, a flicker of recognition and admiration passed through her mind. "It looks good on him," she couldn't help but think.

However, the fleeting contemplation of peace soon gave way to D'yaeb'l's desperation. The grip of her past and the overwhelming desire to reclaim the sword consumed her. Unable to contain her frustration any longer, she cast aside any notion of negotiation and launched herself into battle against Putnam.

The duel between Putnam and D'yaeb'l was fierce and intense, their movements flowing with calculated precision. Each strike was met with a swift parry or a skillful evasion. Putnam's mind raced, analyzing D'yaeb'l's every move, searching for an opening to subdue her without causing further harm. He understood that defeating her would require more than just physical strength; it would require unraveling the anger and desperation that fueled her actions.

Despite the ferocity of their confrontation, Putnam remained resolute in his commitment to minimize casualties. He deftly redirected D'yaeb'l's attacks, aiming to incapacitate rather than deliver fatal blows. With every parry and counterstrike, Putnam showcased his restraint and unwavering dedication to his principles. Deep within, he recognized that the battle extended beyond the physical realm; it was a clash of ideologies, a test of wills.

Their dance of blades continued, a testament to their skill and determination. Putnam's movements were calculated, searching for an opportunity to disarm D'yaeb'l's anger and guide her towards a different path. He knew that defeating her meant understanding her motivations, challenging her beliefs, and offering an alternative perspective. So, in a pivotal moment, during the climactic stages of their duel, Putnam deftly invoked the Somme Sign, directing its power towards D'yaeb'l's face to induce a deep sleep. As the witcheress succumbed to the Sign's power, her eyes grew heavy, and her body gradually relaxed.

Recognizing the opportunity to end the conflict peacefully, Putnam swiftly secured her, his movements careful and purposeful, and carried her to a safe location. It was a decisive act, ensuring that D'yaeb'l would no longer pose a threat to herself or others.

With a heavy heart, Putnam tended to his wounds, the throbbing pain serving as a constant reminder of the sacrifices he had made in the pursuit of his ideals. As he dressed his injuries, he couldn't shake the hope that the encounter, the poignant battle of ideals, had left a lasting impact on D'yaeb'l. Deep down, he yearned for her to find a way to release the grip of her past and embrace a future free from anger and vengeance.

Time, he knew, was the key ingredient for change. Perhaps, given time and introspection, D'yaeb'l would come to realize the futility of her actions and seek a different path. Putnam held onto that glimmer of hope, believing in the transformative power of understanding and compassion.

While tending to his wounds, Putnam couldn't help but reflect on the intricate web of his journey. The mayor's daughter, now safe in her father's comforting embrace, served as a reminder of the lives touched by his actions. It was a bittersweet victory, bringing peace to the troubled city of Aldesberg, yet tinged with a sense of compassion for his former lover.

He acknowledged that D'yaeb'l was driven by her own pain and her unyielding longing for the sword. In another life, their paths might have intertwined differently, but the choices they had made led them down separate roads. It was a melancholic thought, tinged with regret for what could have been under different circumstances.

With the mayor's daughter secure and the city on a path towards healing, Putnam knew it was time to embark on a new chapter of his journey. Lyria beckoned, offering both professional opportunities and personal exploration. It was a chance for him to continue honing his skills, to seek new challenges, and to find solace in a world that was constantly changing.

As he prepared to leave Aldesberg behind, Putnam carried with him a mix of emotions—hope, compassion, and a tinge of melancholy. His path had been intertwined again with D'yaeb'l's, if only for a fleeting moment, and he couldn't help but wonder what the future held for both of them. With resolve in his heart and the lessons learned from their encounter, Putnam set forth towards Lyria, ready to face whatever awaited him on his next chapter.

Contracts in Lyria & Rivia and life with Marina (April 1281 - early December 1281)

After his duel with D'yaeb'l, Putnam continued

his journey on The Path, finding the rumored work in Lyria and Rivia. During this time, he encountered [Marina](#), a half-elf who owned The Red Crow tavern in the forest near the city of Lyria. Their relationship blossomed from April to December, providing Putnam with much-needed emotional healing and aiding him, albeit to a small extent, in overcoming his self-hatred and achieving other emotional breakthroughs. Marina became a catalyst for longer and more fulfilling relationships, as their bond endured for almost a year.

However, as September approached, Putnam's best friend, Fabio Sachs, reentered his life, presenting him with an opportunity to join an expedition to the Far East. Reluctantly, Putnam made the difficult decision to end his relationship with Marina two months later, as his newfound journey took precedence. He owed it to Fabio, after all. Fabio had once saved his life, providing him with shelter and care when his world had been reduced to ruins and ashes. Putnam felt a deep sense of loyalty towards his friend and understood the importance of protecting him from any potential exotic dangers they might encounter on their expedition.

The Idr of Lyria

Like many other witches of his time, Putnam found himself facing the dangerous [Idrs](#), dreadful creatures born out of twisted experiments. Among them, IDR UL Ex IX 0007 BETA, also known as Number Seven, wreaked havoc on the outskirts of Lyria, causing merchants to fear traveling through the area. The concern reached Queen Meve, who resided in the Royal Palace of the summer capital at the moment. Exhausted from the weight of her experiences, the aging queen decided to issue a contract on the monster rather than organizing a hunting party, hoping that a knight errant or witcher would take on the challenge. Thankfully, Putnam arrived and accepted the contract.

Once they met, Putnam and Queen Meve agreed on new terms, and the determined witcher embarked on his mission to exterminate the experiment. It quickly became evident to Putnam that he faced a highly intelligent and vicious adversary. He understood the need to remain vigilant and employ all of his skills to overcome the formidable Idr. Through meditation and careful observation, the witcher familiarized himself with the beast's behavior, identifying its weaknesses and formulating a strategy.

The ensuing battle was relentless with the clash between Putnam and the Idr

intensifying with each passing moment, their battle escalating into a symphony of violence and skill. Putnam was put to the ultimate test as he danced around the Idr's attacks, his movements a blur of agility and precision. With every swing of his silver sword, he aimed for the vulnerable spots on the Idr, seeking to exploit its weaknesses.

The Idr's mandibles snapped with ferocity, threatening to tear through Putnam's defenses. Its razor-sharp pincers sliced through the air, leaving trails of danger in their wake. But the witcher's lightning-quick reflexes and honed senses allowed him to anticipate the Idr's moves, granting him the split-second advantage he needed to evade its lethal strikes.

As the grueling duel raged on, the Idr's intelligence became apparent. It was no mindless beast but a cunning predator. The creature used its delicate feelers to track Putnam's every move, analyzing his patterns and planning its counterattacks with calculated precision. The witcher found himself engaged in a deadly game of wits, where even the slightest hesitation could mean the difference between victory and death.

But Putnam refused to yield. He adapted to the Idr's evolving tactics, improvising his own strategies to outmaneuver the creature. Each clash of silver against chitinous armor reverberated through the air, a testament to his unwavering resolve and unyielding determination. With each passing moment, the Idr grew more desperate, unleashing its full fury upon the relentless witcher.

Finally, the decisive moment arrived. Putnam's acute perception identified a critical weakness in the Idr's defenses, a vulnerable spot that could turn the tide of the battle. Seizing the opportunity, he launched a devastating assault, his blade finding its mark with precision. The Idr let out a guttural screech, a final cry of defeat, as it collapsed to the ground, its life force extinguished.

Exhausted but victorious, Putnam stood amidst the aftermath of the battle. Beads of sweat dripped down his brow, mixing with the grime and, blood both from the monster and himself, that adorned his weary face and other parts of his body. With the Idr vanquished, the surrounding area fell into an eerie silence. The once-threatening monster now lay lifeless, a mere memory of the terror it had inflicted. Putnam took a moment to catch his breath, his gaze lingering on the fallen monster.

First visit to The Red Crow

After the intense battle, which had raged late into the night, Putnam found himself utterly exhausted and wounded. It was clear that he needed immediate assistance before his injuries worsened. Summoning the last reserves of his strength, he navigated his way to the closest refuge available: The Red Crow, a tavern owned by Marina.

As Putnam stumbled through the tavern's entrance, his presence drew immediate attention. Marina, despite the blood and grime that coated his weary form, swiftly abandoned her other tasks and rushed to his aid. Her sudden focus on the wounded witcher raised some annoyance among the non-human patrons who frequented the establishment.

The Red Crow had become with the years a sanctuary for non - humans, specially the marginalized non-human population from Lyria's ghettos. In that time, blamed unjustly for the recent monster attacks, they sought solace and safety within the tavern's walls, escaping the false accusations and persecution by the humans. Marina's establishment had become a place of refuge and camaraderie, where individuals of different races and backgrounds could gather without fear of judgment or prejudice.

With her innate empathy and compassion, Marina disregarded the grumbles of her non-human customers and tended to Putnam's wounds. She led the weary witcher to a secluded area within the tavern, where her modest clinic was located. Drawing upon her knowledge of herbal remedies and healing arts, Marina skillfully treated his injuries, applying soothing salves and carefully binding his wounds. Her touch was gentle, yet purposeful, evoking a sense of comfort and trust.

As Putnam lay in the makeshift infirmary, his body healing under Marina's attentive care, they had the opportunity to spend time together. Their conversations flowed freely, sharing experiences, and mutual understanding fostering a connection between them. Marina's compassion and resilience resonated deeply with the battle-weary witcher, and he found solace in her presence.

After his quick recovery, Putnam thanked Marina for her help and said his goodbyes. He made his way back to the Royal Palace, where he was welcomed by Queen Meve, who was eager to hear his report on the battle with the Idr. With the creature's head in his hands, Putnam recounted the intense fight, detailing the creature's incredible speed, intelligence, and deadly weapons. Meve listened

intently, impressed by the witcher's bravery and skill.

As Putnam finished his report, Meve congratulated him on a job well done and paid him for his services. She also expressed her gratitude for his quick response to the contract and praised him for saving the city of Lyria from probable death by starvation. Putnam felt a sense of indebtedness to Marina, who had provided him with medical care without charge. He expressed his desire to help her by asking Meve to reduce the special taxes on non-humans, at least for a while, as a way of showing his gratitude. Meve was initially hesitant, given the potential backlash from the more racist members of the human population, but in the end, she agreed.

The news was very well-received in the ghettos, where non-humans were struggling to survive in difficult circumstances. However, it was met with hostility from the more bigoted members of the human population. This decision would have far-reaching consequences in the future, such as, for example, being one of the reasons, although not the main one, of the second burning of Marina's tavern.

Cridam's Kosynier

After encountering the Idr, Putnam continued his journey through Lyria, traveling eastward until he reached the small village of Cridam. There, he was surprised to learn of a Kosynier attacking and killing several villagers. The creature's presence was unusual for the time of year, as they typically emerged later in the summer rather than in the spring.

Intrigued by the unusual circumstances surrounding the early emergence of the Kosynier, Putnam engaged in extensive conversations with the village leader and the concerned villagers. Through their collective knowledge and anecdotes, he pieced together a plausible explanation for the creature's untimely presence.

It was revealed that Lyria had experienced a remarkably warm winter, an aberration in the usual climatic patterns of the kingdom. The milder temperatures had disrupted the Kosynier's hibernation, stirring the creature from its slumber prematurely. The implications of this revelation only fueled Putnam's determination to confront and neutralize the threat, for the village's safety and the restoration of balance in the natural order.

With unwavering determination, Putnam scoured the vast expanse surrounding the village of Cridam, meticulously searching for any traces of the elusive

Kosynier. Field after field, he meticulously examined the crops, hoping to find a clue that would lead him closer to his quarry. Days turned into nights, and nights into days as the witcher's relentless pursuit continued.

Finally, his perseverance paid off. Amongst the swaying wheat fields, a flicker of movement caught Putnam's keen eye. There it was—the Kosynier, its majestic form blending seamlessly with the golden sea of vegetation. Carefully, he followed its tracks, ensuring that he remained undetected, keenly aware of the danger that lay ahead.

As Putnam closed in on the creature, his instincts kicked into high gear. The Kosynier, sensing his presence, suddenly turned and launched itself towards him in a fierce attack. Reacting with lightning speed, the witcher drew his silver blade, meeting the creature head-on in a clash of strength and skill.

Their battle echoed through the fields, each strike carrying the weight of survival. Putnam's blade found its mark, inflicting a deep wound upon the Kosynier. The creature's blood stained the earth, leaving a trail that would make tracking it easier.

Undeterred by the creature's ferocity, Putnam pursued the wounded Kosynier as it retreated into its hidden den—an intricate network of tunnels hidden beneath the earth's surface. With calculated precision, the witcher collapsed the tunnels, sealing the Kosynier within its subterranean prison. Cornered and desperate, the wounded creature launched one final, ferocious assault. Putnam's every move was calculated and deliberate, his reflexes honed to perfection. With a well-timed strike, he dealt the decisive blow that brought the Kosynier to its knees. The air filled with a haunting cry, a chilling testament to the creature's demise.

After the battle, Putnam took a moment to catch his breath, his heart still pounding from the intense encounter. He was relieved to have finally put an end to the Kosynier's killing spree and bring peace to the village of Cridam. As he carefully examined the den, he took note of any details that could provide valuable insights for future encounters with similar creatures. He retrieved the creature's pelt, a tangible proof of his hard-earned victory and a symbol of his triumph over the menacing relict.

Not long after his triumph in Cridam, rumors began to circulate in the local tavern of the village about reanimated skeletons wreaking havoc in the town of Dravograd. Initially dismissing the rumors as mere hearsay, Putnam couldn't shake the nagging feeling that there might be some truth to them. The growing

affection he felt for Marina, coupled with his dedication to his craft, compelled him to investigate further. Deep down, he knew that if the rumors proved to be true, he could fail the contract and perish in it, after all, things like reanimated skeletons have not been seen since the early 9th century, when magic was not regulated. With his mind set on ensuring the safety of the townsfolk, Putnam decided to retrace the path he had taken from the city of Lyria to Cridam, eventually leading him back to Marina's tavern.

Second visit to The Red Crow

It took several days for Putnam to reach Marina's tavern, during which time he heard about how the attacks had become more frequent. Despite the army's efforts to eliminate them, the reanimated skeletons always returned.

Once he arrived, he was relieved to see Marina again and to be able to visit her as a regular customer rather than someone who was dying. As he entered the tavern, he was struck by the familiar sights and sounds of the place. The warmth of the hearth, the smell of fresh-baked bread, and the sound of laughter and conversation all combined to create a sense of comfort and familiarity. A feeling, very similar to the failed future he might have had with Tubiel if she had not passed away, or with Jolanta, if he had not mistakenly decided to abandon her to protect her from himself, awoke in him at that time along with a hint of regret.

Marina greeted Putnam warmly and confirmed that the rumors about the reanimated skeletons were indeed true. Although Marina secretly worked for the Scoia'tael, she had no knowledge of the skeletons. The idea of using the corpses for a more direct attack, rather than for terrorist acts, came from a faction within the group who believed that their current tactics were not effective enough. To carry out this plan, they recruited a rogue Werebubb druid skilled in necromancy. Using his abilities, he reanimated the skeletons of dead soldiers from the Second Northern War to use as a weapon against humans. The group hoped that by bringing down Dravograd, they could prove their point and start a direct war to wipe out humans. The attacks were escalating, and innocent people were being killed. Putnam knew that he could not simply stand by and do nothing.

Over the next few days, Putnam stayed in the city of Lyria doing some minor contracts, like killing the local zeugl for example, while visiting the outskirts just to see Marina during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They discussed everything from the latest gossip in Lyria to the best ways to defeat the reanimated

skeletons. Putnam gathered as much information as he could, asking anyone who passed through the tavern and might know something useful.

As their friendship grew, Putnam found himself enjoying Marina's company more and more. They shared jokes and stories, and an undeniable attraction existed between them. However, not everyone was pleased with their newfound closeness. Some of the tavern's regulars, mainly men who had long been infatuated with Marina, grumbled that she was neglecting her other customers. Despite their mutual attraction, Putnam and Marina hesitated to act on their feelings. Both had been hurt in the past and were cautious about getting hurt again, and Putnam also carried deep-seated self-hatred and guilt over the deaths of his own family and friends. As he bid farewell to Marina, a sense of longing gripped Putnam. He had developed strong feelings for her, but he knew that his journey to Dravograd would be perilous. With a heavy heart, he embarked once more, prepared to confront whatever challenges awaited him.

The rebellious skeletons of Dravograd

After several days of travel, Putnam arrived at the gates of Dravograd and was relieved to see that the walls had held up against the undead army. As he approached the entrance, he was stopped by the city guards, who eyed him warily. Putnam calmly introduced himself as a witcher and explained that he had come to offer his services against the reanimated skeletons. The guards looked him up and down skeptically, but ultimately decided to let him in. They warned him to be careful, as the skeletons were still lurking about in the surrounding countryside.

After successfully gaining entry into the city, Putnam made his way to the nearest inn to gather information about the situation. He listened intently to the conversations among the locals, who spoke in hushed tones about the recent attacks and the fear that had taken hold of the city. Many believed that the undead army was a curse from the gods, punishment for not properly burying the dead from the Second Northern War. As he continued to listen, Putnam heard that the skeletons were becoming more organized, moving in larger groups and exhibiting increased intelligence with each passing day. He knew that this meant the source of their reanimation was likely nearby and that he would have to act quickly if he wanted to prevent further attacks.

Determined to offer his assistance to the city, Putnam sought out the city council and explained his plan to track down the source of the reanimated skeletons. He

promised that, with enough time, he could find and destroy the source, thus eliminating the threat to Dravograd. After hearing Putnam's plan, the council was skeptical at first, but his reputation as a witcher, especially for the events in Lyria where he saved the city from starvation by killing the Idr, preceded him. The council provided him with a small stipend to cover his expenses and promised to spread the word among the citizens that a witcher was on the case. Putnam thanked them and set out to begin his investigation.

He started by speaking with the local gravediggers to learn more about the burials and the condition of the graves. They told him that the skeletons seemed to be emerging from the ground near the old common graves, where many of the soldiers, a mix of locals and invaders who fell in the Battle of Dravograd had been buried. They also spoke of a strange aura emanating from the area, which had been growing stronger in recent days.

Putting this information together, Putnam made his way to the common graves and began to search for any signs of magical activity. His medallion vibrated intensely as he approached the area. It didn't take long for him to find the source: a rogue werebbubb druid turned necromancer, who was using dark magic to reanimate the fallen soldiers and create an army of undead skeletons.

As he stood before the werebbubb druid turned necromancer, Putnam felt a surge of curiosity. The werebbubb were known to be an almost extinct race, and he couldn't help but wonder why this one had turned to necromancy. Before acting, he decided to interrogate the druid, hoping to gain insight into its motivations. With his medallion still vibrating in warning, he approached the being with caution, ready to defend himself if necessary.

Upon closer inspection of the druid's attire, Putnam noticed a familiar emblem embroidered on his tattered cloak - the emblem of the Scoia'tael. It became clear to him that the druid was part of the non-human guerrilla group. As Putnam probed deeper, the druid revealed that his family, like many other non-human families, had been mercilessly slaughtered during a pogrom, leaving him with no choice but to seek refuge with the Scoia'tael where he became a skilled healer and druid, using his powers to protect and heal the wounded non - humans.

However, as time passed, his anger and grief began to consume him, leading him to delve deeper into the darker side of magic. He began experimenting with necromancy, using it to reanimate fallen non-humans and humans alike, believing that he could create an unstoppable army to avenge the wrongs done

to his people.

This was supported by a faction of the guerrillas who believed that terrorist acts were insignificant and that they would achieve nothing if they did not start a real war. Putnam found out that the plan was to lay siege to Dravograd and bring it down to show those who preferred terrorist acts how wrong they were and to organize and start a real war against humans which they believed would eventually lead to their freedom and equality.

Putnam was taken aback by the druid's revelations. He knew that non-humans had long suffered under human oppression, but he also knew that a full-scale war would only lead to more death and destruction on both sides. He urged the druid to reconsider his plans and reminded him that violence only begets more violence. He recounted his own experiences of killing the people responsible for the deaths of Tubiel and Sigurd, and how it did not alleviate the emptiness he felt over their loss. In those moments, he also remembered D'yaebel and Jolanta, especially the latter, for it seemed as if life was telling him in a way that he should leave his guilt behind and move on to a better future, and that he had screwed up by abandoning her.

The werebubb druid appeared to be listening to Putnam's words, his gaze focused on the witcher as he spoke. But as the witcher finished speaking, the druid's expression hardened, and he shook his head slowly. It was clear that his loyalty to the Scoia'tael and their cause was stronger than his desire for peace, and he was not going to let Putnam stand in his way.

With a cold determination in his eyes, the druid drew forth a twisted staff from within his robes, and the air around them seemed to grow heavy with the power of dark magic. Putnam tensed, readying himself for a fight, but before he could even move, the druid had already begun to chant an incantation. The ground trembled beneath their feet as a horde of skeletal warriors rose up from the earth, their bones rattling as they surged forward to attack the witcher. Putnam leapt into action, his silver sword flashing through the air as he parried the blows of the undead soldiers. Despite their numbers, he fought with a fierce determination, determined to put an end to the druid's plans before they could be carried out.

The battle raged on for what seemed like hours, with Putnam gradually wearing down the druid's forces. But just as he thought victory was within his grasp, the druid unleashed a devastating blast of dark magic that sent the witcher flying

backwards, his body crashing to the ground in a cloud of dust and debris. As he struggled to rise to his feet, the werebubb druid advanced on him, his staff raised high, ready to strike the final blow.

But at the last moment, Putnam was forced to make a difficult decision. If with D'yaeb'l he had been forced to choose between the greater good and the lesser good, this time it was between the lesser and greater evil. As much as he sympathized with the druid's plight and saw himself reflected in him, he realized that the consequences of his actions would be catastrophic. The thought of innocent lives being lost in a full-scale war between humans and non-humans would weighed heavily on his conscience.

After a moment of contemplation, Putnam made his decision. With a swift motion, he unsheathed his steel saber and charged towards the werebubb druid. The druid, caught off guard by the sudden attack, attempted to defend himself with a wave of dark magic, but it was too late. Putnam had closed the distance and pierced the druid's heart with his saber, ending his dark magic and putting an end to his plans for war.

As the werebubb druid fell to the ground, Putnam couldn't help but feel a sense of sadness and regret. He had taken a life, even if it was that of a dangerous enemy. But he knew that sometimes, in order to protect the innocent and preserve peace, one must make difficult choices and take decisive action. With a heavy heart, Putnam sheathed his saber and began to make his way back to Dravograd, he couldn't help but reflect on the events that had just transpired. He thought about the werebubb druid's motivations and how his own actions had ultimately led to his demise. The witcher knew that what he had done was necessary to protect innocent lives and prevent the escalation of violence, but it still weighed heavily on his conscience.

Once he returned to the city, as he walked through the now quiet streets, Putnam couldn't help but notice the stark contrast between the peaceful town and the chaos that had almost been unleashed. The town that had seemed so unremarkable before was now a place he would never forget. Putnam had seen firsthand the fragility of peace and the lengths to which some would go to shatter it.

After these events, he made his way to the council and delivered the news, presenting the druid's body as proof of his victory. The council members were shocked at the gravity of the situation and thanked Putnam for his bravery and

swift action. The witcher was relieved that he had prevented what could have been a devastating attack and had saved countless lives. After the council had the town criers report the truth about the reanimated skeletons, Putnam left the council chambers and made his way back to the inn. Exhausted both physically and mentally, he longed for some rest and peace.

As he entered the inn, he was greeted with a sense of relief and gratitude from the townsfolk who had gathered there. They praised him for his bravery and thanked him for preventing the devastating attack that could have befallen their town. Putnam accepted their thanks humbly, but his mind was still weighed down by the gravity of his actions.

He couldn't help but wonder if there was another way to resolve the situation without resorting to violence. As a witcher, he had been trained to fight and kill monsters, but this was different. This was a sentient being, a druid who had once been a healer and protector of nature. Had he made the right choice in ending his life? The case with the people who killed Tubiel and Sigurd was different because, at the end of the day, they were criminals, they contributed nothing but death and destruction. They deserved to be punished for all the lives they had ruined, and killing them was a necessary act of justice. Despite these thoughts, Putnam knew that he had acted in the best interest of the townspeople and had prevented a greater evil from befalling them. For now, he would rest and contemplate his actions.

After a night of restful sleep, mainly due to the exhaustion from fulfilling the contract, which prevented him from having nightmares about the death of Tubiel and Sigurd again, and a hearty breakfast, Putnam set out to do some shopping with the coin he had earned. As he walked through the bustling marketplace, he couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction knowing that he had helped bring peace to the town. With his shopping done, Putnam bid farewell to the town and began his journey back to the Red Crow tavern, eager to see Marina once again. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, Putnam arrived at the tavern. As he entered, he immediately scanned the room for Marina, and his heart leapt with joy when he spotted her. She was as beautiful as ever, and her smile made him feel like he was home. It was that very night when their romance would finally begin.

Third visit to The Red Crow and the beginning of the romance with Marina

Putnam spent the rest of the day in the tavern, enjoying the food and seeing

Marina again. Occasionally, he went out to relax or meditate. After completing the Idr contract and putting an end to the menace of the reanimated skeletons, Putnam felt a sense of relief wash over him. For weeks, he had been on edge, constantly alert and prepared for danger. Now that the danger had passed, he was finally able to relax and enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Despite his efforts, and the support of Jolanta he had been unable to fully shake off the lingering grief from the deaths of Tubiel, Sigurd, and all the people who sacrificed themselves to rescue him, but in that moment, he felt a faint glimmer of hope that he could eventually move on. It was as if a long-dormant part of him had started to reawaken, and he was grateful for the respite.

The day passed quietly, with Putnam briefly meditating due to his Survivor Syndrome and Post Traumatic Stress, which prevented him from meditating properly for very long periods of time. He also enjoyed chatting with Marina, who was overjoyed to see him alive, and with some regular customers, who were gradually becoming more tolerant of him. Putnam also told stories to the children Marina was in charge of, regaling them with tales of his adventures and battles against monsters. As he did so, he couldn't help but be reminded of the deceased Sigurd, and unconsciously, he found himself wanting to stay in the tavern as long as possible.

Once evening came, Putnam re-entered the tavern. All the other patrons had left, and only he and Marina remained. Marina was about to close up for the night when she saw Putnam come in again. She was surprised and pleased to see him, thinking that he would have left by then. Putnam asked if it was no bother to have dinner so late, explaining that he had inadvertently fallen asleep outside while enjoying the scenery. Marina told him that it was no bother at all and invited him to have dinner with her. Putnam agreed and the two dined together, with a surprisingly expensive dinner, accompanied by a bottle of platé.

As they sat down to eat, Marina served Putnam a delicious meal of roasted chicken, steamed vegetables, and freshly baked bread. Putnam couldn't help but notice how much effort Marina had put into preparing the meal, despite it being so late in the day. He thanked her for the meal, to which Marina replied with a smile and a nod.

As they ate, Putnam couldn't help but notice the bottle of platé on the table. The exotic drink reminded him of his time in Zangvebar, which felt like a lifetime ago, despite it only being two years prior in 1279. As he took a sip of the banana wine, he felt a sense of nostalgia wash over him, mixed with a tinge of sadness for all

that he had lost in such a short time. However, this feeling quickly dissipated as he looked at Marina again. Her warm smile and company were a welcome distraction from his thoughts, and he felt grateful for the unexpected dinner companion.

As the night wore on, the conversation grew more intimate and other bottles of wine flowed freely. Putnam found himself opening up to Marina about things he had never shared with anyone before and she listened with empathy and understanding, although they would both vaguely remember anything the next day. For the first time in a long time, he felt like he could truly be himself with someone (because although he had tried with Jolanta, his tragedy was so recent in that time, that in many occasions, he kept things to himself in order not wanting to worry her or burden her further). Unfortunately for the witcher, his demons would continue to haunt him for a long time, but this was one of the many small steps he would take towards overcoming them. And then, before he knew it, they were kissing.

The first kiss was soft and hesitant, as if they were both unsure of what was happening. But as their lips met again and again, the passion between them grew. Putnam found himself lost in the moment, swept up in the sensation of Marina's lips on his. And by the time they realized it, the two had already left the table where they were dining, and were moving around the tavern, kissing each other with increasing passion.

The world around them seemed to fade away as they continued to kiss, their bodies pressed together in a desperate embrace. Putnam felt a fire burning within him that he had never experienced before. It was as if all of his pent-up emotions and desires had been unleashed in that one moment. He pulled Marina closer, deepening the kiss, and she responded with equal fervor. All that mattered was the heat of their bodies, the taste of each other's lips, the rush of adrenaline that came with each passing moment. They moved from the main room to a quieter alcove, where they could be alone and continue their passionate embrace without any possible prying eyes.

Putnam's mind was a jumble of conflicting emotions. Part of him was amazed at how quickly things had escalated between them, while another part was consumed by a sense of longing that he had not felt since Tubiel's death. Jolanta had sparked a similar feeling in him, but it was distant compared to what he felt for Marina. He also remembered D'yaeb'l at that moment, but it was nothing more than a quick thought of something that he thought might have been more

than just sex. He wanted to explore every inch of Marina's body, but not just in a sexual way; he wanted to know every little detail about her and lose himself in her completely. He felt a deep connection to her, as if they were meant to be together in that moment.

Eventually, they broke apart, gasping for breath. They both knew that what had happened between them was intense and powerful, but they also knew that it was just the beginning. They looked into each other's eyes, and in that moment, they both knew that this was just the start of something much bigger.

The Kelpie of the Yaruga

Putnam and Marina woke up feeling groggy and unsure of themselves. The events of the previous night had left them in a state of uncertainty. They both knew that they had crossed a line, and now they were faced with the aftermath. They sat in bed, silent, and avoided eye contact, both lost in their thoughts.

Putnam, for his part, felt conflicted and unsure about what to do next. He couldn't shake the feeling that he might be making another mistake, just like he did with Jolanta before he left her. He also felt undeserving of Marina's affection because of all the demons he carried with him. His past mistakes and failures seemed to loom over him, making it difficult for him to fully embrace the present moment. He wondered if he should distance himself from Marina before he caused her any more pain. However, at the same time, he couldn't deny the strong connection he felt with her. He was torn between his desire to protect himself from further heartache and his growing feelings for Marina.

In Marina's case, the morning after was also full of conflicting emotions. On one hand, she was elated by the connection she had made with Putnam the night before, but on the other hand, the memory of Freyja of Kaedwen, one of the few remaining and active members of the School of the Wolf, and probably the last witcheress from Kaer Morhen, still haunted her. Freyja had left her without a word, and Marina couldn't help but wonder if she had done something wrong. Despite her best efforts to move on, the pain and uncertainty of that past relationship lingered in her mind, making it difficult for her to fully embrace her feelings for Putnam.

As she lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, she couldn't help but feel a sense of dread in the pit of her stomach. What if Putnam left her just like Freyja did? What if he found someone better or decided that he didn't want to be with her anymore? The fear of being hurt again was almost too much to bear.

At the same time, Marina couldn't deny the intense attraction she felt for Putnam. His rough exterior and vulnerable heart drew her in, and she wanted nothing more than to explore the depths of their connection. But how could she do that when the fear of heartache was so strong?

As they both lay there, lost in their thoughts, the tension between them was palpable. It was clear that they needed to talk about their fears and uncertainties if they were going to move forward. But neither of them knew where to begin. However, they had to put their thoughts aside as the tavern required Marina's attention. They got up and arranged themselves, still feeling awkward and tense, with silences lingering between them.

As they sat down for breakfast, Marina couldn't help but notice how quiet Putnam was. She could feel his inner turmoil and knew that he was struggling with something. She wanted to reach out to him, to comfort him and tell him that everything would be okay, but she also knew that he needed time to sort through his thoughts.

They tried to make small talk, discussing the weather and the happenings around town, but the silences between them remained. The tension was still present, and they both felt it. It was as if they were walking on eggshells, trying not to upset the fragile balance between them.

Despite their inner turmoil, they both tried to push through the awkwardness and enjoy their breakfast together. They both felt vulnerable and unsure, and the prospect of opening up to each other was daunting. But just as they were about to do so, customers started coming in, and Marina had to get to work at the tavern. On Putnam's part, work called him when a page entered the tavern, running and almost choking, asking for the witcher's help. An important nobleman had disappeared during his stay in the Spalla fortress, and everyone present believed that a monster was responsible. A missive had been sent throughout the kingdom, calling for someone to take care of the situation.

Putnam's attention was immediately captured by the urgency in the page's voice. He swiftly gathered his things, preparing to depart for Spalla fortress to investigate the disappearance of the nobleman. But as he stood up to leave, he noticed the sadness in Marina's eyes. He approached her, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. There were no words at that moment, nor were any needed. Putnam wiped away the nascent tears with his free hand and gave her a soft smile. Then, he hugged her tightly, promising her without saying a word that

he would come back to talk about everything that had happened the night before and more.

After that, Putnam and the Royal Page departed for the north of the kingdom towards Spalla. During those days of travel, Putnam took the opportunity to ask his guide for more information about the nobleman who had disappeared and the circumstances surrounding his disappearance. The guide informed him that the nobleman's visit was just a routine one for troop training and maintenance purposes. There was no indication of any trouble. Nevertheless, the nobleman had vanished without a trace, and the soldiers were at a loss as to what had happened. Putnam listened carefully, pondering the possibilities as they rode towards the fortress.

During the journey, Putnam and the Royal Page had several conversations about the nobleman's background and what could have caused his disappearance. The guide informed him that the nobleman , named Drotis Gezzet was a wealthy merchant and a supporter of the queen's reign, known for his generosity and kindness. He was well-liked by many, and there didn't seem to be any political or personal motives for his disappearance.

Putnam listened carefully, trying to piece together any clues that could help him solve the case. He also asked abou Spalla and its surroundings, hoping to get a better understanding of the terrain and the possible hiding places for a monster or any other suspect. As they rode towards the fortress, Putnam's guide described the surrounding areas of Spalla. The fortress was situated on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Yaruga River, which flowed swiftly and deeply below. The surrounding countryside was mainly covered in dense forests and rolling hills, providing ample cover for any creature or person trying to hide.

Putnam took note of the information, considering the possible dangers that he might face during his investigation. He knew that he needed to be cautious and prepared for anything, as the situation could quickly escalate. As they approached Spalla, he could see the imposing fortress looming in the distance, its stone walls towering over the surrounding landscape.

As they neared the fortress, Putnam and the Royal Page were met by the commander of the garrison, who provided more information about the nobleman's disappearance. He informed them that the nobleman had vanished from his chambers during the night, leaving no trace behind. The guards on duty had heard nothing unusual, and there was no sign of forced entry or struggle.

Putnam examined the room where the nobleman had been staying, searching for any clues that might shed light on his disappearance. He inspected the room thoroughly, looking for anything out of place or suspicious. But he found nothing that could explain what had happened.

As the investigation progressed, Putnam began to suspect that there was more to the case than meets the eye. He could sense that there was something strange about the whole affair, and he was determined to get to the bottom of it, no matter the cost. As Putnam continued his investigation, he began to hear rumors from the soldiers about a Kelpie that was said to reside in the river below the fortress. According to the legends, Kelpies were shape-shifting water spirits that would lure unsuspecting travelers and riders to their deaths by drowning them in the river. These beings could transform themselves into different shapes, often appearing as beautiful women to seduce their prey before dragging them under the water.

For a witcher like him, they were nothing more than practically a myth, as they were a relic that was believed to be extinct. But as he spoke to more soldiers, he realized that many believed in the existence of the Kelpie and its malevolent powers. He decided to investigate further, considering the possibility that the creature might be connected to the nobleman's disappearance.

As Putnam delved deeper into the local lore surrounding the Kelpie, he learned that these creatures were said to be exceptionally strong and cunning, capable of outsmarting even the most seasoned, errant knights, hunters and witches. Many believed that they could control the currents of the river and would use their powers to drag their victims to their doom. Putnam knew that if the Kelpie was responsible for the nobleman's disappearance, it would be a formidable opponent. He spends hours meditating and rereading the information in his bestiary, trying to determine its weaknesses and vulnerabilities, as well as remembering Keldar's lessons.

In the meantime, he continued his investigation, interviewing witnesses and examining the scene of the nobleman's disappearance. Although he still had no concrete evidence linking the Kelpie to the case, he couldn't shake the feeling that there was something related to it at play. As the days passed, Putnam grew increasingly anxious and was getting frustrated, this case was getting too bogged down. He redoubled his efforts, searching for any clues that might lead him to the truth.

As Putnam patrolled the banks of the Yaruga, his senses on high alert, he caught a glimpse of something moving in the water. He approached cautiously, his hand resting on his sword's hilt, ready for any threat. And then, as he drew closer, he saw her - a beautiful woman, sitting on a rock in the middle of the river, her hair cascading down her back like a waterfall. Putnam felt a sudden jolt of discomfort when he saw the woman's face, which had transformed into a spitting image of the deceased Tubiel. The Kelpie, thinking it had successfully seduced its next victim, made a fatal mistake. It tried to talk to the witcher, seducing him and giving him false comfort, asking him to come with it and leave everything behind. However, Putnam was not fooled. He asked the Kelpie why it didn't have the scar on its belly, which Tubiel had. The Kelpie had copied almost every detail of Tubiel's appearance but had overlooked this one crucial detail because its powers of mind-reading didn't extend that far. Realizing that its cover had been blown, the Kelpie let out a blood-curdling scream and lunged at the witcher, revealing its true form, looking as a pile of seaweeds with tentacles. Putnam was ready, drawing his silver sword and preparing to strike.

With sword in hand, Putnam launched himself into battle with the Kelpie. The monster was a cunning adversary, using its powers to control the currents of the river and trying to drown the witcher while its tentacles aimed to disarm Putnam. The battle was fierce and intense, with both combatants trading blows and neither able to gain the upper hand. However, as they clashed, Putnam quickly realized that his silver sword was not enough to defeat the Kelpie. He needed a different strategy.

Thinking quickly, he remembered an old trick his mentor, Keldar, had taught him. Taking advantage of a brief lull in the battle, while the Kelpie attempted to shape-shift into a new form, Putnam used the Volun Sign against the Kelpie. He launched a soft plasma bolt from his fingertips, directed at the monster. The bolt was intensified by the water and hit the Kelpie with incredible force, sending it reeling backward.

The Kelpie let out a howl of pain, and its grip on the river currents faltered, giving Putnam the opening he needed. With a swift and precise strike, he plunged his silver sword into the monster, slaying it once and for all. The Kelpie let out one final scream before collapsing, never to torment the river again.

After that, Putnam rested as best he could, leaving himself to dry on the shore, not without first bringing the creature's body, and by the time he awoke, at noon from the exhaustion of the previous night's combat, he returned to the fortress

with the monster's body, though without any tangible proof that the nobleman's disappearance was caused by the kelpie, he had not been able to find it.

As Putnam made his way back to the fortress with the Kelpie's body in tow, he couldn't help but feel a sense of disappointment. Despite his victory over the monster, he still lacked any tangible proof linking it to the nobleman's disappearance. As he approached the gates of the fortress, the guards recognized him and quickly let him inside.

Putnam made his way to the nobleman's quarters, hoping to find something that would shed light on his disappearance. He searched through the nobleman's belongings, examining every inch of the room for any clues. But despite his thorough search, he came up empty-handed.

Frustrated and exhausted, Putnam retired to his own quarters, hoping to get some rest. But his mind was restless, still searching for answers. As he lay in bed, he couldn't help but think that he had missed something, some detail that would connect the Kelpie to the nobleman's disappearance.

The next morning, Putnam rose early and headed back to the scene of the nobleman's disappearance. He searched the area once more, looking for any overlooked clues. And that's when he saw it - a faint trail leading away from the riverbank. It was almost imperceptible, but to a trained witcher's eye, it was unmistakable.

Following the trail, Putnam found himself deep in the woods, surrounded by the sounds of nature. As he pressed on, the trail grew stronger, and soon he found himself standing in front of a small cave entrance. He drew his silver sword, ready for anything, and stepped inside.

The cave was dimly lit, and the air was damp and musty. As Putnam crept deeper inside, he began to hear the sound of running water. And then he saw it - a small underground river, running through the heart of the cave. And there, lying on the bank of the river, was the nobleman's body. Putnam rushed towards the bank of the river, and as he got closer, he could see the nobleman's body was badly mutilated. It was evident that he had been attacked and dragged to the cave by a powerful creature. The witcher knelt down beside the body, checking for any signs of life, but it was too late - the nobleman had been dead for several days.

With great care, Putnam lifted the lifeless body of the nobleman and cradled it gently in his arms. Slowly and steadily, he made his way out of the dimly lit cave, cautiously navigating the treacherous terrain of slippery rocks and the swift-

moving water of the underground river. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he emerged into the warm embrace of the daylight, taking in a deep breath of fresh air. Overwhelmed with relief and a sense of accomplishment, Putnam was grateful for his successful mission in finding the nobleman's body. He knew that this would provide much-needed closure for the victim's family and loved ones. He then carefully carried the body back to the fortress, where he examined it with the commander and other soldiers. Through the evidence, he was able to prove that the Kelpie was indeed the culprit behind the nobleman's death, and that it had been using the underground river as its winter lair being the nobleman, probably part of its reserves for the next winter.

Putnam knew that he had to be thorough in his examination of the nobleman's body. He carefully checked for any wounds or signs of struggle that could indicate the cause of death. As he examined the body, he noticed several deep gashes and bruises, which had likely been inflicted by the Kelpie's tentacles. The evidence was clear - the nobleman had been the victim of a brutal attack by the ferocious monster.

Putnam then turned his attention to the belongings of the nobleman that he had recovered from the Kelpie's lair. Among them, he found a small leather-bound notebook that contained detailed notes about the nobleman's business dealings, as well as a map of the surrounding area. Putnam could see that the nobleman had been a man of great wealth and influence, and the Kelpie had likely seen him as a prime target for its next meal. particularly due to the nobleman's plans to develop Spalla into a city, which would inevitably impact its natural habitat.

After that, Putnam collected a quite generous reward, partly taken from the nobleman's fortune, as he would have likely paid well, according to the soldiers and the commander. He then returned to Marina, as he had promised. The experience with the Kelpie, and its transformation into Tubiel, had given him the opportunity to reflect. He thought that despite everything, and for what he felt for her, it was right to give their relationship a chance. Perhaps he could find the future that had been taken from him with her. And so it was, at least for a time.

Life with Marina and new encounter with Fabio Sachs, reconciliation of both (April - September 1281)

After several days, Putnam made his way back to the Red Crow. During his absence, he had ample time to reflect on what had happened between him and

Marina. He knew that his feelings for her were genuine, and he couldn't deny the way his heart raced whenever he thought of her. Yet, he couldn't help but feel a sense of uncertainty about the future. Would they be able to make it work? Would they be happy together?

However, it wasn't his witcher status that made him uncertain. He had heard stories during his time at Dyn Marv of how some witches had come to settle down, Jad Karadin being the most notable example, before joining the School of the Lynx. And besides, he himself had done it with Tubiel and Sigurd in Brenna, and with Jolanta later on. Even if it was only for a couple of months, at that moment, he was thinking years ahead.

It was the fear of doing harm that made him hesitate. Putnam carried a burden of demons with him, and he didn't want to burden someone else with it. The guilt was too heavy, and he didn't want anyone else to have to face that burden. It just wasn't fair. He feared that if he settled down with Marina, she would have to bear the brunt of his traumas. He didn't want to expose her to the horrors that he had experienced. He wanted her to live a happy and fulfilling life, free from the burden of his past.

The guilt weighed heavily on him, and he wasn't sure if he could ever shake it off. He knew that he had to deal with it, but he didn't know how. The thought of losing Marina was unbearable, but the thought of harming her was even worse. He vaguely remembered what she had told him about Freyja and how she had left her without a word. This added to his guilt for having done the same with Trill and later with Jolanta. The last thought burned him deeply.

As he entered the Red Crow, he scanned the room for Marina. He saw her sitting at a table in the corner, talking with a few patrons. She looked up and their eyes met. Putnam felt a wave of relief wash over him. She smiled at him, and he felt his heart skip a beat. He approached her cautiously, unsure of how she would receive him. As he approached Marina, she stood up from her seat and walked towards him. The witcher's heart raced as she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him into a warm embrace. It was a passionate hug, one that caught him off guard, and he could feel her warmth radiating off her body.

For a few moments, they stood there, lost in each other's embrace. Putnam could feel his worries and doubts slipping away as he held Marina. He didn't know what the future held, but he knew that he wanted to be with her. He pulled away from the embrace, looking into her eyes. After that, they parted ways for

the moment, and Putnam took the opportunity to have a snack as he had arrived at the tavern in the afternoon. He waited for Marina to finish her chores, so they could have dinner together.

As they sat down for dinner, Putnam couldn't help but feel a sense of relief wash over him. He knew that his feelings for Marina were genuine, and he was glad that she felt the same way. They talked about all that had happened since they last saw each other and discussed the practicalities of settling down at the tavern. Putnam made it clear that he would never be a freeloader and would look for work nearby. He would be gone for a few hours at most. It was true that there wasn't as much work for the witches as in his golden age, but there still was. Especially in the cities, more specifically in the non-human ghettos, where the poor sanitary conditions and the neglect of the sewers gave rise to creatures such as zeugls, wererats, weremoles and others. Putnam acknowledged that he would not make large sums of money, given the poverty of these areas, but he wanted to contribute to their lives in whatever way he could.

Marina listened intently to Putnam's plans, but she was not convinced. She didn't want him to risk his life anymore, and she believed that he could always work with her at the tavern. However, after some persuasion, Marina eventually accepted Putnam's decision. And so, in that night of April of 1281, their life together finally began.

After that, several months passed for the witcher in a healthy, calm, and loving relationship with Marina. This relationship proved to be beneficial for him in the future, slowly moving towards more and more stable relationships, as already mentioned. Like any relationship, theirs also had its difficult moments. Mainly, Marina would scold Putnam for coming back from contracts in the city in a bad state, being late, or for getting high with Black Seagull to deal with his Survivor Syndrome. It broke the innkeeper's heart to see him like that.

Overall, the relationship was great for the witcher, and he enjoyed the relatively peaceful life. He took care of the children that Marina was in charge of, telling them stories about his contracts, and learning how to cook better with her help, among other things. It was a spring and summer that felt almost bucolic, a much-needed respite after everything that had happened since Tubiel's death.

But all this would change in September, when Putnam's past would revisit him, a turning point for all that was to follow. . This past would be none other than his

best friend, the future famous explorer Fabio Sachs. During the time they were separated. Fabio had dedicated himself to continuing his research and cartographic mapping, with the idea of exploring the exotic and unknown Far East, and learning about the cultures and creatures that inhabited it.

To do this, he returned to seek funding and was eventually financed by the Crown of Lyria and Rivia, in exchange for discovering new and better trade routes. Fabio was on his way to visit Meve in the city of Lyria to introduce him to his companions for the expedition that would leave for the East in early 1282, when he decided to stop at The Red Crow. As Fabio and his companions entered the tavern, they were greeted by the usual bustle of patrons, the sound of lively music and Marina. As Fabio and his companions settled in at a nearby table, she approached them with a smile and a friendly greeting. She recognized Fabio because of what Putnam had told her about him, because deep down, even though they were at odds, he still cared for him very much. Putnam was not at the tavern at the time, he had gone out to make one of the usual nearby contracts.

As Marina approached the table, Fabio couldn't help but notice her warm smile and the way her eyes sparkled with lively energy. He introduced himself and his companions to her, and Marina quickly took their orders for food and drinks. As they waited for their order, Fabio couldn't help but notice a unique ofiri steel saber hanging on one of the walls, similar to the one that he remembered that his friend Putnam carried with him. The weapon piqued his interest, and he asked Marina about it.

Marina smiled, but she decided not to mention the relationship she had with Putnam. Instead, she told Fabio that the sword belonged to Putnam, who often visited The Red Crow. She went on to describe him as a kind and loyal friend who frequented the tavern, despite his profession as a witcher, which often took him on the move.

After Marina's words about Putnam being a loyal friend who frequented the tavern, Fabio couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt. He remembered the bitter argument that had led to a rift between him and Putnam. Their disagreement had been intense, and Fabio had realized too late that he could have been more understanding with his friend. It had been a year and a half since they had seen each other, and Fabio wondered if it was too late to mend their friendship.

As Fabio sat in the tavern, lost in thought, Marina brought him and his

companions their food and drinks. He thanked her and decided to enjoy the rest of the evening with his companions, but he couldn't shake off the feeling of regret for his actions towards Putnam. Perhaps, he thought, there was still a chance to make amends and rebuild their friendship. Fabio and his companions spent noon and evening at the tavern, by the time it began to get dark, and they were about to go to the Royal Palace to see Meve, Fabio turned his head towards the source of the smell that entered the tavern. The stench of mud, sewage, and zeugl guts was all too familiar to him. As he looked at his old friend, he couldn't help but feel a mix of emotions - relief at seeing him again, guilt over their falling out, and a hint of jealousy at the sight of Marina's concern for Putnam.

An awkward silence filled the room as Putnam and Fabio locked eyes. The tension was palpable, and it seemed like neither of them knew what to say. It was Marina who finally broke the silence, her concern for Putnam overcoming any discomfort she may have felt. She walked over to him, a look of worry etched on her face, and began to ask him about his condition. Putnam responded with a wry smile, clearly used to this kind of treatment from her. As Fabio watched as Marina fussed over Putnam. It was clear to him now that Marina and Putnam were more than just friends, and he couldn't help but wonder what could have been if he had been more understanding of Putnam's grief and traumas.

Despite his mixed feelings, Fabio knew that he had to put his own feelings aside and make amends with his old friend. He walked over to Putnam, feeling the weight of their past disagreement and the need for forgiveness. As Fabio approached Putnam, he could see the weariness etched on his friend's face. Both looked at each other for a few moments in silence, and without saying anything, both hugged, the weight of their past disagreement seemed to dissipate, and they both felt a sense of relief. Fabio and Putnam held onto each other tightly, as if trying to convey all their feelings through the embrace. They stayed that way for a few moments, not saying a word, just feeling the warmth of each other's body and the strength of their friendship.

Eventually, they pulled away from each other, and Fabio looked at Putnam with a newfound sense of understanding. Fabio knew in that moment, that he had been wrong to judge Putnam without fully understanding his pain and suffering. Putnam, too, looked at Fabio with a renewed sense of appreciation. He knew that his friend had always been a compassionate and just person, and that his disagreements with him had come from a place of deep care and concern. As they looked into each other's eyes, they both knew that their friendship had

been restored, and that they would always have each other's backs, no matter what.

After that, Fabio explained his plans for the expedition he had in mind, and the meeting he would have had with Meve that same night, to introduce her to those who would accompany him. It was then, when he suggested him to join, that a witcher would be good for the team, he would have plenty of work, and the expedition would be protected from any unknown threat.

Putnam couldn't help but chuckle at Fabio's suggestion. He exchanged a knowing look with Marina, who smiled back at him. He then turned to Fabio and explained that he was in no condition to join a Royal Visit or future expeditions at the moment, covered as he was in mud, sewage, and zeugl guts. He needed a bath, some rest, and perhaps a few days to recover from his recent battles.

Fabio nodded, understanding Putnam's position. He reiterated that the offer was open until early December, giving Putnam plenty of time to decide. With one last hug, Fabio and his companions left the tavern, eager to prepare for their meeting with Meve.

But in truth, it was much, much simpler. If he accepted Fabio's offer, he would have to break up with Marina and he needed time to think about it properly. On the one hand, Fabio had been there for him at his worst, he had rescued him, cared for him, helped him give Tubiel and Sigurd a dignified funeral, etc.. On the other hand, Marina had been a constant source of comfort and companionship during this months, and had shown him that the possibility of building the future he had dreamed of was there. It wasn't an easy decision for Putnam to make, and he needed time to weigh his options.

Celebration in honor of the Expedition of Fabio Sachs to the Far East (end of 1281)

"I've heard of love at first sight, but trying to kill someone and then sleeping with them takes it to a whole new level. It's like she's playing a dangerous game of 'Romantic Roulette'. You never know if you'll end up in bed or with a dagger to your neck. But hey, kudos to you, Putnam. You've certainly raised the bar for first dates."

—Fabio to Putnam after Putnam saved him from being assassinated by D'yaeb'l

At the end of that year, the crown of Lyria and Rivia would organize a party, to honor Sachs and all the members who would accompany him. Putnam attended

the party, after thinking about Sachs's offer for two months and a week, he finally accepted it. Despite everything he had built with Marina, he felt indebted to the explorer.

D'yaeb'l would attend this party, using a fake identity, hired this time by the Nilfgaardian Secret Service with the intention to kill Fabio Sachs and cancel the expedition, as Nilfgaard aimed to prevent closer contact between the North and the East, maintaining their monopolies on various products from that region. Despite their defeats in various wars, Nilfgaard still exercised a form of soft power in the area through trade. In exchange, of course, for the sword and a good sum of money. The sword had continued to change hands after the mayor considered it cursed in Aldesberg. However, their plan would ultimately fail due to the feelings that had developed between Putnam and her during their previous encounters. This forced the witcheress to escape.

At the grand party, Putnam gracefully navigated the sea of guests, engaging in polite conversations and exchanging pleasantries. Getting along surprisingly well with Istredd, whom he would meet at that party. Yet, his mind incessantly wandered back to the weighty decision he had made. He understood that the journey ahead would be arduous, but he couldn't ignore the sense of duty compelling him to accept the offer extended by his friend.

Amidst the revelry, memories of Marina lingered in Putnam's thoughts. Their recent breakup weighed heavily on his heart, even though he believed it was the right choice. A pang of sadness pierced his chest as he recalled the unique bond they had shared. It was something precious, a solace he had never thought possible after the devastating loss of Tubiel. Though it couldn't fill the void entirely, it came close, and parting with it left a bittersweet ache. He had come a long way because of her, and for that, he would always be grateful. It pained him deeply, just as it had pained him to leave Jolanta behind, although believing it was for her own well-being.

Even with their relationship severed, Putnam couldn't shake the sensation of having let Marina down. He had made promises of a shared future, assuring her of his steadfast presence. However, now he found himself embarking on a journey that would keep him away for an extended period, possibly years. The weight of this departure pressed upon him, an another overwhelming burden of guilt for upending the plans they had forged together.

Sometime later during the party, Putnam found himself standing alone on a

balcony, gazing out at the city below. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes, attempting to quiet the racing thoughts in his mind. In that serene moment, he came to a realization: his decision to accept Sachs's offer was not solely driven by a sense of obligation or debt. It was a quest for self-discovery, a yearning to break free from the confines of his comfort zone and embrace the unknown. It was a leap of faith, a willingness to take risks and venture into uncharted territories, both physically and emotionally.

As Putnam stood on the balcony, lost in thought, he was startled by a sudden presence behind him. He turned around to find D'yaeb'l, the other witcheress with whom he shared a complicated history. Memories of their past encounters flooded his mind, evoking a mix of excitement and danger that they had experienced together. In that moment, Jolanta came to his thoughts once again, and a pang of regret washed over him. He couldn't help but miss her deeply in that instant.

Dressed in a breathtaking gray gown adorned with captivating Kovir influences and intricate Redanian details, D'yaeb'l exuded an air of mystery. A pendant, featuring a sapphire intricately crafted in the distinct Vran style, hung gracefully from her neck. Her nails, painted in a shade of gray reminiscent of the elegant hues of a snow leopard, complemented her attire flawlessly. Concealing her feline pupils, she wore a mask, a clever disguise that covered half of her face, ensuring her unique eyes remained hidden from those unaccustomed to mutant characteristics.

Meanwhile, Putnam donned an elegant Lyrian suit that seamlessly blended traditional and aristocratic elements. The ensemble featured a vibrant green color palette adorned with exquisite gold embroidery. His attire was completed with light brown pants, complemented by a pair of brown boots that added a touch of sophistication. Dark brown gloves adorned his hands, and his meticulously groomed hair and beard further enhanced his distinguished appearance.

Despite the tumultuous history they shared, an undeniable chemistry lingered between them. Putnam couldn't help but notice the way D'yaeb'l's gaze lingered on him, hinting at a shared connection. In her presence, he was transported back to a time when he felt truly alive, momentarily escaping the inner turmoil that had plagued his mind.

They danced with each other, the music guiding their steps, and engaged in

lively conversations as if the events in Aldesberg had never taken place. It felt as if they were two lovers, reuniting after a long separation, relishing in the joy of being together again. However, beneath the surface of their reunion, Putnam couldn't shake the feeling that D'yaeb'l harbored ulterior motives. His instincts, honed by years of training as a witcher, warned him to remain vigilant.

While appearing to enjoy the festivities, Putnam kept a watchful eye on Fabio from a discreet distance. Utilizing his heightened senses, he ensured the safety of his friend, ready to intervene should any danger arise. The mingling of emotions—nostalgia, curiosity, and a lingering sense of mistrust—made the night a delicate balancing act for the witcher.

As the night wore on, Putnam found himself increasingly distracted by thoughts of D'yaeb'l, his recent breakup with Marina, and lingering thoughts of Jolanta. These swirling emotions caused him to lose focus on the present moment. However, his intuition proved to be sharp when he witnessed D'yaeb'l subtly leading Fabio towards one of the upper floor balconies. In an instant, a wave of realization washed over him, confirming his suspicions all along.

A sense of dread settled in Putnam's heart as he grasped the gravity of the situation. He knew exactly what D'yaeb'l intended to do, and he couldn't allow it to happen. His mind raced, adrenaline coursing through his veins, as he propelled himself towards the balcony where D'yaeb'l and Fabio stood. Determined to protect his friend, Putnam's resolve solidified.

Approaching the scene, he strained his ears to catch snippets of their hushed conversation. Time was of the essence, and he understood the urgency of his actions. With every step, his determination grew, fueled by the bond forged through the shared experiences with Fabio. He couldn't bear the thought of losing him, not after everything they had endured together.

Thus, Putnam had to rely on his wit and negotiation skills. He attempted to reason with D'yaeb'l, pleading for her to spare Fabio's life. However, her determination to fulfill her mission blinded her to reason, and she adamantly refused to listen. Undeterred, Putnam steadily advanced, step by step, closing the gap between them. He invoked their shared history, appealing to the moments they had experienced together, in a desperate attempt to reawaken her dormant emotions.

In a surprising turn of events, as the tension peaked, D'yaeb'l abruptly broke away from the standoff, stealing a swift kiss before swiftly disappearing into the

night. Putnam found himself momentarily stunned by the unexpected gesture, but he swiftly regained his senses and refocused on the urgent task at hand — saving Fabio.

With unwavering determination, D'yaeb'l flung Fabio off the balcony, aiming for the treacherous ground below. In a race against time, Putnam reacted swiftly, leaping after his friend and catching him with one arm. Simultaneously, he summoned the protective power of the Quen Sign, encasing both himself and Fabio in a shield that shielded them from the devastating impact.

They landed heavily in the Royal Garden, but the protective shield of Quen softened the fall. Putnam swiftly assessed Fabio for injuries and felt relieved to find that, aside from a few cuts and bruises, he was unharmed. Fabio, now safe but curious, began to question Putnam about his "new girlfriend," based on the snippets of conversation he had overheard during the tense encounter. Putnam chuckled, assisting his friend in adjusting his disheveled attire, and proceeded to recount the intricate and complicated history he shared with D'yaeb'l. From their initial encounter, where she attempted to take his life but ended up in a passionate night, to the duel in Aldesberg and the recent balcony incident.

As they made their way back to the party, Putnam noticed that D'yaeb'l was nowhere to be found. Despite her escape, the thought of her lingering out there, potentially causing more harm, weighed heavily on his mind. Fabio, on the other hand, couldn't help but feel a sense of relief. He had always been aware of Putnam's complex relationships with women, but this situation took it to a whole new level. Although conflicted, Putnam put on a brave facade for Fabio's sake, determined not to let his friend worry more than he already had. They rejoined the festivities, and Putnam maintained a watchful eye on Fabio, ensuring that he was never out of sight. Deep down, he grappled with conflicting emotions about the events that had unfolded, yet his commitment to protecting his friend remained steadfast, just as they had hinted during their reconciliation embrace at the Red Crow several months prior.

The party concluded smoothly, leaving everyone with a pleasant hangover the following day. The Crown had made arrangements for them to stay in rooms before and after the event, ensuring they were well-rested for the upcoming expedition. Once they had recovered, they wasted no time and immersed themselves in their preparations.

Excitement flourished among the expedition members as the days passed. They

eagerly engaged in discussions about their plans and strategies, envisioning the uncharted lands they would explore and the treasures they could uncover. Fabio, serving as the expedition's sole leader, alongside individuals like Istredd, devoted long hours to studying maps and charts, meticulously plotting the most efficient route while considering potential hazards.

However, not everything was without challenges. Some expedition members expressed concerns regarding the limited knowledge they possessed about the Far East, a region largely unfamiliar to the Nordlings at that time. They feared encountering unforeseen obstacles and dangers that they hadn't anticipated. Fabio did his best to alleviate their worries, instilling confidence in their abilities and emphasizing the extensive planning he had undertaken for the expedition.

Despite these reservations, the members of the expedition persisted with unwavering dedication, ensuring they had all the necessary provisions for the journey ahead. Supplies were meticulously organized and packed, while weapons and equipment underwent thorough inspections to guarantee optimal performance.

As the departure date approached, anticipation reached a fever pitch. The expedition members stood poised, ready to embrace the challenges and adventures that awaited them. Their determination to succeed and etch their names into history burned brightly, as they eagerly awaited the moment when they would embark on their grand expedition.

Travel with Fabio Sachs around The Continent towards the Far East (1282 - 1285)

So, Putnam and Fabio marched together in early 1282 with a group of different people to the Far East. The expedition included : Fabio as the explorer, cartographer, and expedition leader. Istredd, as a mage, who also served as a archaeologist, group physician, and informal co-leader. Putnam which assumed the role of the group's witcher and also a informal co-leader.

Stucco Zangenis, a specialized mage in offensive magic with an interest in genetics, who joined the expedition to collect exotic monster genes. Unfortunately, he met his demise in Zerzura in 1283. Zavist, a mage brought in as a possible replacement for Stucco, who also perished in Zerzura in 1283. Istredd

had a strained relationship with Zavist but decided to include him in the expedition due to his abilities.

Hira Aen Hurashim, an [Aen Manche](#) elf from the Hurashim tribe, who had been the sole survivor of her tribe's extermination by Nilfgaardian soldiers from the Magne Division. She had been traveling alone since then and crossed paths with the expedition while they were traversing the Fiery Mountains. Putnam and Hira had a brief romance, and she shared valuable desert survival tips with him, benefiting not only the witcher but also other members of the expedition.

Eberhatt of Rivia, a healing mage, who joined the group as Istredd's replacement physician in case of emergencies. Six dwarven mercenaries that accompanied Eberhatt due to his lycanthropic condition. Later on, several Mardu individuals, including Monga and one nicknamed "The Explorer". Kai Yih, a pirate captain, and her crew , although temporarily. Łukasz, one of the last witchers from the School of the Wolf who had lived in the Far East, after the dissolution of the School in 1273, who joined the expedition while passing through Zerrikania on their way to Valkare. Łukasz would later settled in the Tuyotuki ami Islands, but during his time in the expedition, he served as a substitute witcher for Putnam and also as a translator alongside the Mardu and Istredd.

At its peak, the expedition consisted of approximately forty-three individuals, including a cartographer, two Mardu members, five mages, two witches, six dwarven mercenaries, and around thirty pirates. Later in Zerzura, D'yaebł would joined the expedition after being liberated from slavery. She was the last notable addition, not counting the local assistance obtained in Ketu Rahu and the Tuyotuki Islands.

Thus, the explorer and the witcher found themselves in uncharted territories, encountering civilizations that the nordlings had believed to be mere legends and making contact with new and unknown cultures. One such encounter occurred in 1283 with the Aen 'Agde elves.

The first year of the expedition

Let's not deceive ourselves; the first year of the expedition was rather uneventful. There were no significant discoveries, unless we consider improving the map of the territory between Zerrikania, Haakland, and the Northern Kingdoms a "*great discovery*". There were no surprises or incredible adventures. Despite being in unknown territory, the monotony of travel prevailed. However, this allowed the

group to get to know each other better and form a strong bond. Istredd even developed a more than cordial relationship with Zavist, for example. As the saying goes, familiarity breeds fondness. And why did all this happen, you may wonder? Simply put, they got lost. Fabio was an excellent cartographer, but his sense of direction wouldn't improve until much later. The group's original plan was to reach Haakland by autumn of the same year, where they intended to negotiate with the Great Khan and secure a trade agreement with Lyria & Rivia, thus breaking Redania's monopoly on Haaklandian silk. However, they ended up arriving in early winter of that same year. The one who found more entertainment was Putnam, as he could enjoy battles against several monsters he had already studied, as well as new ones. In addition to his brief romance with Hira after she joined the group. In fact, the two most notable events were the addition of Hira and their encounter with the Mardu, descendants of one of the many human groups from the still undiscovered Eastern Continent, according to the Nordlings.

Let's talk about Hira, then. As we have already mentioned, Hira was an Aen Manche elf who had lost her entire tribe some time ago and had since been traveling and surviving on her own. Being a true Aen Manche, she was a tall elf, about the same height as Putnam, to be more precise, with sun-bronzed skin, light violet eyes, and sandy blonde hair. Like all elves, she was exceptionally beautiful. Her slightly slanted eyes suggested that she may have had some Aen Agde ancestry. Her encounter with the expedition happened in a rather amusing way. While the group was passing through the Fiery Mountains, they had set up traps for hunting, and Hira, who intended to ambush them, accidentally fell into one of the traps. Fabio discovered her and promised to free her and take her to Istredd for healing, as long as she didn't cause them any harm. She agreed, but not before making a blood pact with the explorer, following the traditions of her culture. As a gesture of gratitude, considering she could have starved in the trap, she ended up traveling with them.

As we have mentioned before, all the women who crossed paths with the witcher contributed something to him, even if it this changes unfolded gradually, like plants sprouting from a cracked rock. With a few examples being Evelyn as compassion, Tubiel as humanity, Radeyah as cunning, Trill as optimism, D'yaeb'l as ingenuity, Jolanta as empathy, and Marina as self-belief (even if he hated himself a lot). The Aen Manche would not be an exception, and although her presence was brief, she would teach him resilience, alleviating some of the

burdens and guilt the witcher carried. That together with the impetus given by Marina, among others, this would pave the way for a decade-long marriage with Aine and a century and a decade with Jolanta in a more distant future.

The relationship between Hira and Putnam started as that of a teacher and apprentice. As Hira taught him more about her culture, the creatures of the desert, and so on, it gradually evolved into something more. There was already a physical attraction between them because Putnam was intrigued by her, being the first elf he had met who looked so different physically (excluding Marina since she was a half-elf and Cervin, who was also a half-elf and a witcher like him, although he could tan as dark as Hira since he was from Aen Nílfé ancestry), and Hira was captivated by Putnam's famous bicolored eyes. This attraction only grew as the days passed, fueled by the monotony of their journey and Putnam's philosophy at the time of "one nail drives out another."

Indeed, some of the tattoos that Putnam eventually had were Aen Manche tattoos, inspired by Hira's persuasion. In a similar vein to the Tuyotukian philosophy of mending broken things with gold, Hira believed that the tattoos would serve as a means for Putnam to cover the scars of his past, particularly those inflicted during his torture. These intricate markings carried a symbolic significance, representing healing and resilience.

However, as the group approached their destination of Haakland, tragedy struck. In the midst of traversing the arduous Korath Desert, Hira fell victim to a ferocious desert monster. Despite Putnam's and the mages' valiant efforts, they were unable to save her in time, and the loss of Hira left a profound void within the expedition. This devastating event also caused the group to become even more disoriented, further veering off course.

However, their encounter with the Mardu, which occurred as a result of their dire situation, was surprisingly non-hostile. The time spent among the Mardu allowed Fabio Sachs to gather valuable information and improve his mapping of the area. This proved beneficial for the development of the trade routes that Lyria and Rivia sought to establish with distant lands. Additionally, some Mardu individuals even chose to join the expedition, further strengthening the bond between the two groups. The Mardu even nicknamed Putnam ***Yirridi Wandjina***, which roughly translated meant "*He of the different eyes*" in reference to the Golden Griffin's characteristic heterochromia.

Thus, while the loss of Hira was a devastating blow to Putnam and the

expedition, their encounter with the Mardu brought unexpected opportunities and knowledge, ultimately contributing to their ongoing journey to Haakland.

Winter in Haakland (December of 1282)

Finally, after nearly a year of travel that was both boring and dangerous (although they achieved some unexpected benefits), the expedition reached Haakland. More specifically, they arrived at [Haakgan](#), what technically nordlings knew as Haakland, and more specifically to the administrative division of Patyak in the Gadny - Gür province. This country had a relatively pleasant winter climate, similar to Lyria, where humidity prevailed over snow. It had been a challenging journey, but they had finally accomplished their goal. It would be upon their arrival in Haakland that things would become truly interesting, especially in the life of our beloved witcher.

Fortunately for the expedition, Patyak was a administrative division heavily influenced by Nordling culture (since the province of Gadny - Gür had been founded by nordlings who were accepted by the Haaks). In fact, it was which Redania traded and held a monopoly on the famous silk. As a result, the cultural clash was not as intense. They even spoke a dialect of the Common Speech that, although on the verge of diverging into another language, heavily influenced by the Haaklandian tongue, was still relatively understandable. The people of Patyak were a mixture of Haaklanders and Nordlings, product of a relaxation the great-grandfather, grandfather, and father of the future Great Khan Zeus, of trade-only policies with the Nordlings, eventually allowing for some cultural exchange. This created an intriguing demographic in the region. Nevertheless, it was evident that there were class differences between the purely Haaklandian inhabitants and those who were not.

In fact, the prince and future Great Khan, Zeus, was born and raised in Patyak for a significant part of his life. This upbringing in Patyak resulted in him not having such a strong Haaklandian accent in Common, and influenced by the culture of the region, he convinced his father to send him to Ban Ard to study magic, thus becoming the first officially recognized sorcerer of Haakgan.

And we must continue talking about Zeus, as the prince would be crucial for the exhausted expedition to regain strength and thrive as it did. In Haakland, witches did not exist, nor did anything similar as a concept. Occasionally, in some southern khanates, a witcher, mainly from the School of the Manticore, could appear, back in the 12th century, but it was rare. And after the fall of the

school, it became even rarer. If there were ever any, they quickly fell into oblivion. This meant that there was no animosity towards witchers, which was a mental relief for Putnam. However, it also meant that there were no "specialists" responsible for eliminating the monster pests. The tasks of monster hunting fell to the hordes, often given to Haaklandians who had committed crimes as a form of redemption if they survived the encounter. They were led primarily by experienced dishonored warriors, including military personnel who had, for example, fled from a battle, an act considered a grave offense in Haakland's culture. Occasionally, nobles would lead these hordes, whether they were the children of the current Khanum of the province, or the Khan, as was the case with Zeus, to take on these tasks to prove themselves as worthy heirs to their fathers and the future titles of Khanum or Khan (in Zeus's case). In the prince's case, it was a combination of both, as he had fled from Nilgaard after the diplomatic incident with [Brianna Vassermiller](#) and, in addition, had failed to secure a political union through a grandchild for the Khan, which would have ensured influence in the territory. So, he had been "dishonored" and had to prove himself once again through acts like this one and others to demonstrate his worth.

The expedition was en route to the capital of Patyak, Casaray (a name derived from [Casarak](#), a black dragon worshipped in the area when the territory was part of Zerrikania back in the 9th century) when they found themselves trapped in the midst of a battle between Zeus's horde and a colossal monster, specifically a Shor Khorkhoi. This monstrous creature was a relative of the infamous Aka Allghoi, sharing a similar kinship akin to that of a dragon and a wyvern.

The relative of the monster that Putnam faced in Ofir several years ago was similar to this one—a giant worm but larger in size, measuring the length of a dragon and the width of about four wyverns.

By the time the expedition found itself caught in the conflict between this monster and Zeus's horde, it had been causing problems for Zerrikanian merchants trying to use that route to access Patyak for several months. So, when the Khan decided to relocate his capital in Patyak following the usual nomadic pattern, and also to show the Gadny - Gür nordlings that they were part of his people, Zeus, who was traveling with his elderly father, saw the opportunity to prove his worth by attempting to defeat the monster. Defeating such a creature would surely secure him the title of Khan, surpassing his other 29 siblings. Being one of the eldest (among the first 15 children) did not guarantee his rise to

power.

Quickly, Fabio and his companions, upon witnessing the arrival of the formidable group of mounted warriors, sought refuge and observed the battle from a safe distance. Initially, it appeared that their attempts would be futile, but they eventually managed to find safety by climbing a nearby hill. Unfortunately, Istredd injured his right hand when an arrow inadvertently pierced through it as the mage attempted to make a gesture to communicate with the warriors. The horde paid no attention, completely engrossed in summoning the monster, with little regard for the actions of a "Western barbarian."

The battle was a spectacle truly worthy of being witnessed, a testament to the indomitable human spirit against forces that, if left unchecked, could be considered gods to them. Arrows, bows, and crossbows clashed against the might of the creature, which surely, in its own world, would have reigned as the king of its ecosystem, the alpha predator. Here, brought forth by the Conjunction of the Spheres long time ago, it seemed to be the case, or at least that's how it appeared to Putnam. Observing from a distance, despite the monster's sluggishness, it dispatched the warriors with ease, as if they were mere flies buzzing around. On the other hand, the warriors had managed to inflict some damage on it, albeit minor. The giant worm seemed to possess highly resistant skin, likely due to the need to withstand immense pressures while burrowing underground, the witcher thought.

Zeus fought like everyone else at that moment, but Putnam, with his telescopic vision granted by his mutations, which made the use of devices unnecessary, quickly noticed how different this man—perhaps a sorcerer—was. Physically, he appeared too perfect compared to the others. And indeed, when half of the horde had fallen, the prince began to wield magic, specifically aerial magic, in his quest to defeat the creature.

Although the witcher and a large part of the expedition believed that the warriors would win the battle (especially with a mage on their side), this was not the case. Sooner rather than later, the warriors began to fall until only Zeus remained. The expedition watched eagerly as if they were witnessing the final match of a gladiator fight (ironic, considering how Zeus's former partner ended up). They observed as the mage confronted the creature. Putnam looked on with concern, not because he cared about Zeus, but because if the mage failed, the monster would likely come after them. Fabio glanced at Putnam with worry, sensing his thoughts. Istredd and the other mages, instead of focusing on the

battle itself, observed the spells that Zeus cast, particularly one that resembled the famous and impossible-to-replicate Alzur's Thunder, though not quite perfect (perhaps due to Zeus's accent hindering his pronunciation). It was still quite impressive, and some would even argue that it was an enhanced version of that spell. However, the monster remained standing, and Zeus grew increasingly tired. There came a point where he started making more mistakes, and in a moment of vulnerability that could have been fatal, Putnam entered the battle against the monster. Motivated by his desire for death and his need to protect the expedition, he indirectly saved the prince's life.

The expedition let out a collective cry of "PUTNAM, NO!" as soon as he urged his horse forward, descending from the hill towards the monster. However, it was already too late. Putnam was determined to end it, even at the cost of his own life. The monster, upon spotting his approach, shifted its attention from Zeus, granting the prince a temporary reprieve, and fixed its gaze upon Putnam instead. The witcher smiled and set his plan in motion, if it could be called that, which he had devised in his mind while observing the battle. It was clear that the creature couldn't be defeated with magic or conventional weapons, as their impact had been minimal. Bombs might inflict some damage, but he couldn't be certain. Thus, he chose what Istredd would later label as "madness": infiltrating the interior of the monster.

With its segmented skin resembling that of an earthworm, Putnam could scale the creature's body, utilizing the gaps between the segments, and venture inside. If it possessed organs similar to the relative he had faced in Ofir, his goal would be to eliminate all of its hearts and ultimately bring about its demise. So, sooner rather than later, once he was close enough to the monster, with unwavering determination, Putnam wrapped his right hand tightly around the silver chain. He drove the pointed end into the creature's flesh, securing it firmly as an anchor. With a swift motion, he propelled himself upwards, defying gravity and scaling the monstrous being.

As he ascended, the enormity of the creature became increasingly apparent. Its segmented body stretched out before him, each section pulsating with a sinister rhythm. Putnam's senses sharpened, attuned to every subtle movement and twitch of the beast's flesh. He pressed on, his muscles burning with exertion, his heart pounding with adrenaline. Putnam maneuvered his way through the labyrinthine gaps. The creature writhed and convulsed, attempting to dislodge its persistent assailant, but Putnam held steadfast, refusing to relinquish his grip.

As he neared the creature's upper reaches, its hot breath washed over him, carrying with it the stench of decay and the promise of danger. The sounds of the world below faded into a distant murmur, replaced by the deafening thud of his own heart and the rhythmic vibrations of the creature's movements.

Reaching a plateau between two towering segments, Putnam paused to catch his breath, and summoning his reserves of strength and resolve, Putnam resumed his ascent. He leaped from segment to segment, his movements swift and fluid. Each leap brought him closer to his ultimate objective—the hearts of the creature, the seat of its vitality.

Finally, as he reached the apex of his perilous journey, Putnam found himself face to face with the monster's massive maw. Its rows of razor-sharp teeth glistened in the dim light, a chilling reminder of the peril that awaited within. But Putnam did not falter.

With a deep breath, he steeled himself for what lay ahead. Stepping into the gaping abyss, he plunged into the depths of the creature's interior. Darkness enveloped him, punctuated only by the faint glow of his cat eyes and his silver blade, his trusted companion in countless battles.

Navigating the labyrinthine passages, Putnam moved with purpose. He felt the pulsating rhythm of the creature's organs reverberating through his being, guiding him towards his ultimate objective.

And then, at last, he stood before the hearts—the source of the monster's life. Without hesitation, Putnam unleashed a flurry of deadly strikes, each one aimed at severing the life-giving organs. The creature convulsed in agony, its mighty form trembling under the onslaught. As the first three hearts ceased their rhythmic beating, the creature's movements faltered, its strength waning. Putnam knew victory was within reach. So with one final strike, he dealt the decisive blow in the last heart, delivering the monster to its long-awaited demise.

The monster collapsed, with Putnam trapped inside. Following the thunderous impact, silence settled over the area. Zeus stared at the creature's lifeless form, his breath still labored. The expedition, their concern mounting, descended from the hill, fearing the worst for Putnam. Fabio and Istredd hurried to the monster's body, their voices tinged with sorrow as they called out to Putnam, hoping for a response. Fabio, in particular, expressed deep sadness, while Istredd, despite his previous unease towards witchers due to Geralt, had formed a genuine

friendship with Putnam. As tears welled in their eyes, on the verge of mourning his loss, Putnam emerged from within the monster, covered in its blood and rests of the destroyed hearts, a mischievous smile playing on his lips.

And even though the members of the expedition scolded him for his recklessness as soon as they saw him emerge, pointing out that he could have talked to one of the mages to lend him a hand in his plan, they couldn't help but feel relieved to see him safe and sound. Zeus, now more or less recovered, looked at the expedition, and especially at the witcher who had been his savior. During his time in the Northern Realms, he had a relatively unpleasant experience with a witcher from the School of the Cat, whom Brianna had to defend him against when he visited Ebbing to meet the family of his then-intended bride. Therefore, the impact of another witcher saving him was notable. In fact, the first word that came out of Zeus's mouth after experiencing that near-death encounter was spoken when he and Putnam locked eyes.

"*Khamgaalach*" (Хамгаалагч) he called him, which, translated from Haaklandian, means Protector. Even though he hadn't killed the monster, Zeus knew he could continue to undertake other missions to prove his worth to his father, so he was deeply grateful to the witcher. This nickname that Zeus gave to Putnam would stay with him during his stay in the country, becoming the name by which he would be known in Haakland. Centuries later, once the tales of Fabio's adventures with Putnam became famous, this would be influence his canonization after his death in 1555. Being known as Saint Putnam, the Protector against Darkness. Although the canonization of Jolanta as Saint Jolanta, the Defender of the Weak and Guardian against Injustices, in the early 1500s would also greatly influence this, but that is a story for another time.

Afterward, Zeus and the expedition exchanged introductions. The members of the expedition were surprised that Zeus spoke the Common Tongue but grateful for it, as it meant that the Mardu accompanying them wouldn't have to speak Haaki and constantly translate. Zeus shared a somewhat embellished version of his history with the group, portraying Brianna as a villainous figure. In return, the expedition explained the purpose of their presence in Haakgan.

Utilizing his status as a prince and partly as a favor to Putnam, Zeus guided them to meet his father, who, as mentioned earlier, resided in the capital city of Patyak at that time. With Zeus leading the way, the journey to the capital on horseback took no more than an hour.

Putnam's need for a bath and rest was overwhelming, but he understood that duty took precedence. He hoped that the Great Khan would be understanding of their current state. As they journeyed, Putnam couldn't help but notice Zeus's limp, which became more apparent as they entered the city and began walking. He wondered about the cause of the limp, speculating that it might be a birth defect beyond the reach of magic. His speculation seemed to be fairly accurate.

The meeting with the Khan turned out to be quite successful. In stark contrast to his son, who would soon ascend to rulership, the Khan exuded charisma and approachability. He possessed a certain gravitas when necessary but also displayed a tender side that put them at ease in his imposing presence. The purpose of their visit was explained, and Zeus offered his apologies to his father for his failure to slay the monster. However, Putnam stepped in, commanding Zeus for his courageous fight and beseeching the Khan not to punish him. The clash of charisma between the witcher and the Great Khan played out, and in the end, the Khan was not only convinced but also grateful that Putnam had saved the life of his seventh son. He pledged to spread Putnam's name throughout the Khanate, promising him abundant luxuries as tokens of gratitude. Meanwhile, Zeus would be entrusted with further tasks to redeem himself from the dishonor of losing Brianna, not only politically, but also sentimentally (deep down, the Khan harbored adoration for the Scarlet Sorceress and found it difficult to believe his son's claims of her wickedness, having met her in person)

Putnam was about to modestly decline the lavish offerings, but Zeus nudged him with an elbow before he could utter a word, and he relented, accepting the generous gestures. As for the rest of the expedition, the Khan extended an invitation to stay with him throughout the winter season. This would allow them ample time to build rapport, get to know one another better, and engage in discussions about the trade agreements they had initially sought by making the expedition.

The Khan went so far as to offer some of his concubines to the witcher, but Putnam politely declined. All he needed was a decent place to stay and work. Upon discovering that witches did not exist in the country, he saw it as an opportunity to face an abundance of monsters that he couldn't afford to miss. However, beyond his professional pursuits, Putnam yearned for a period of introspection. He wanted to confront his past actions, delve into the depths of his mistakes, and trying to

make peace with the choices he had made. His mind wandered through memories of passionate encounters and fleeting romances, contemplating their impact on him. He craved the time and space to reflect upon the complexities of his own life. Little did he know that his decision would prove wise, for the winter held unexpected surprises in store for him.

The Protector

“Do you want me to tell you what I saw? I saw a man condemned to abandonment, a broken, insignificant, and mediocre man with the air of a hero. He's an asshole who tries to make up for the death of his "kitty" by frolicking in other beds, only to wake up alone! Oh, and let's not forget his mission to rid the world of evildoers, huh? With any luck, he'll get his beloved "doll" back from whatever rat's nest they buried her in.”

—D'yaebel confessing to Putnam why she didn't kill him

The Great Khan kept his word, and the witcher was showered with luxuries. Not only was he given a place to stay, but multiple luxurious accommodations. They were extravagant enough to make even the most opulent inn in the Northern Kingdoms tremble.

Although Putnam often found them excessive (he would have been content with something more modest), he gradually grew accustomed to the lavish lifestyle that his predecessors in the 10th century had enjoyed. It surpassed even his time in Ofir (excluding the emotional and physical aspects, of course). He found himself with up to four contracts per day, earning a substantial income (although not as lucrative as the wealth he had accumulated from his time in Zangvebar, it must be noted). One particular luxury that became a habit for him was smoking opium, having his own personal opium den in every place he stayed, courtesy of the still-unknown region of [Bia Thin](#), more specifically the kingdom of Vineta, to the Nordlings. This greatly aided him in dealing with his sleep problems and other issues stemming from his traumas. It also facilitated deep contemplation of his life and provided a means for profound reflection.

In Haakgan, apart from slaying the monster that had nearly taken Zeus' life, Putnam also dispatched other creatures such as a Khiimori, a Witkul, and a Yin Shu. He also encountered the usual necrophages that plagued the land.

Whenever the prince had the opportunity, they would meet. Following their encounter with the monster and the meeting with the Khan, they developed an affinity for

each other and enjoyed their companionship. They would often gather to smoke opium, accompanied by Zeus' brothers. Although they didn't forge a deep friendship, a sense of trust existed between them. Unfortunately, the witcher's naivety in failing to anticipate Zeus' actions 68 years later would come back to haunt him.

Thus, the winter passed, until one day, nearing the end of the year 1282, Putnam received an unexpected visit, just as it had happened two years ago. And that visit was none other than D'yaeb'l. Same time, same movements—it seemed as if the Cat had planned it. The significant difference was that she didn't attempt to kill him, and Putnam, on that occasion, was enjoying a well-deserved bath. Furthermore, unlike their previous encounters (since they would see each other more times before what would happen to the Cat), there was no passionate and wild encounter like the one they had when they first met. Their relationship, still heavily physical due to their shared traumas that made it challenging for them to express emotions, had evolved with each subsequent encounter, gradually moving away from being merely "enemies with benefits" and becoming something more, even though neither of them wanted to admit it.

Putnam was glad to see her again, even though he didn't show it at first. He simply wondered what had brought her so far, although he could make an educated guess. Similarly, D'yaeb'l was glad to see the Griffin, even though she didn't show it. It was as if the incident at the party had been a mere fleeting argument between partners for both of them, rather than an assassination attempt.

As if reading his mind, D'yaeb'l explained to Putnam, after he turned and their gazes met, that she had arrived in the Khanate after traveling and working as a guard for a Redanian caravan that sought silk to sell upon their return to the Northern Kingdoms. The reason? The sword—it was quite clear, but neither of them voiced it aloud. Nevertheless, both of them understood it perfectly without uttering a word.

And how did she find him? Well, that became more than obvious when D'yaeb'l started teasing him about how Putnam had saved Zeus and mentioned some of the other contracts she had heard about, playfully acting as a damsel in distress. Putnam couldn't help but laugh along with her. Furthermore, it was easy to recognize him from the description of his eyes.

The Golden Griffin, without hesitation, invited her to bathe with him, to indulge

in the luxuries, smoke opium together, and learn more about the whereabouts of the sword. They also needed to catch up in general, as a whole year had passed since they last saw each other. They had things to discuss. And the opium would assist them in doing so.

The Cat undressed and joined him in the bathtub. The warm water enveloped them, creating an intimate atmosphere as they spent a long time together, indulging in luxuries, and relaxation. They caught up on each other's lives, sharing stories and experiences while the opium filled the air, adding a dreamlike quality to their interactions. With each passing moment, their connection deepened, transcending the boundaries of mere physical presence.

As the opium's effects gradually faded, their conversation delved into more emotional and personal territories. It was as if the drug had provided a conduit for their unspoken desires and unexpressed emotions to finally find a voice. They discovered that beneath their superficial differences, they shared a profound commonality—a shared understanding of pain, loss, and the struggle to forge a meaningful existence in a cruel world. They were two sides of the same coin, each representing a distinct path of coping with their haunting past.

Putnam, having undergone a period of introspection, found it somewhat easier to articulate his feelings. The passage of time had provided him with clarity and allowed him to embrace vulnerability. He opened up, sharing his thoughts and emotions with a newfound ease, surprising even himself. On the other hand, D'yaeb'l faced a more arduous challenge. The weight of her age and the burden of carrying her inner demons as shields had made her resistant to showing vulnerability or emotions beyond those of anger and pain. However, the bond between them, forged in shared experiences and unspoken connections, encouraged her to take hesitant steps towards revealing her true self. Being the first significant step among many that D'yaeb'l would take that night, asking Putnam for help in retrieving the sword. She explained that it was in the possession of the Khanum of Patyak, named Temulun Abagai Tuya, and with his status as a "Protector," she was confident that he would be able to persuade her to relinquish it.

But in the end, D'yaeb'l resorted to expressing her emotions through physical intimacy, as it offered a veil of indirectness, shielding her from the vulnerability of exposing her feelings too directly to Putnam. Being the witcher that he was, Putnam acquiesced to her desires, allowing their connection to transcend words. Emerging from the bathtub, they stood in the room, allowing the air to dry their

damp bodies, creating an atmosphere charged with anticipation.

Curiosity got the better of The Cat, and she couldn't resist asking Putnam if he had been with others since their last encounter. Though they were never officially a couple or defined their relationship, the mere act of opening up to each other had created a sense of exclusivity in her mind. As her hand caressed the scar on his lip, she posed the inevitable question. Putnam, with honesty in his voice, confirmed that he had been involved with Jolanta, another member of her school, sharing the story behind the scar she was tenderly touching.

However, consumed by a sudden surge of jealousy, an emotion she would later regret, D'yaeb'l impulsively seized one of the daggers she always carried. Carelessly left on the nightstand, the blade found its mark in Putnam's left leg, representing a desperate and misguided attempt to assert her possessiveness over him. The act, driven by fleeting emotions, stood in stark contrast to Putnam's compassionate response. Despite the pain and surprise, he remained composed and understanding.

In that moment, for the first time in years, D'yaeb'l felt a flicker of the humanity she once possessed, the same humanity that Kristov had taught her still existed within herself. She realized the depths of her own inner struggles and the need for redemption. Witnessing how calmly Putnam tended to his wound, without shouting or arguing, without labeling her a "monster," touched her deeply.

Overwhelmed with remorse, D'yaeb'l's eyes welled up with tears. She realized the gravity of her actions and the pain she had inflicted on someone she cared for deeply. With a trembling voice, she pleaded for forgiveness, her words laden with guilt and sorrow. Putnam, with his unwavering empathy, reassured her that he understood the turmoil within her, and that their bond would not be broken by a momentary lapse of judgment.

The Sword

After that encounter, with its respective incident, D'yaeb'l and Putnam spent the night sleeping together, for the first time as if they were a couple (although they were not, they still had a long way to go). It was a peculiar experience for them, considering they had worn their emotional armor for so long, but they quickly adapted to it. It was different from their first encounter when they slept separately in the same bed, as if trying to deny each other and convince themselves that what had happened was merely a mistake, a momentary lapse.

It felt as if that room had transformed into a sanctuary for them. Within its walls, the masks they wore could be cast aside, and they could embrace their true selves without fear or judgment. For him, it was a respite from the stoicism he had maintained, allowing him to release the burden of pretending to be "fine" when he wasn't. And for her, it was a refuge from the intimidating persona she had cultivated, where she could reveal her vulnerability and shed the image of the wild and terrifying Cat Witcheress. The very same D'yaeb'l whose precious treasure of humanity had been unjustly denied so many times, and despite her name, nickname, and insult repeatedly given by Brehen using the Elder Speech version of the word, to the point where her true name held no meaning, she was not a "devil" but rather a fallen angel yearning to soar again, a person whom life had simply not treated kindly.

The next day, although somewhat uncomfortable, was not as awkward as the first time. They simply needed some time to adapt to the new reality of their connection, a connection that didn't undergo gradual transformations but rather sudden and intense leaps. It was like taking leaps of faith that, despite the fear, turned out to be successful. They woke up late, initially believing that everything that had transpired the previous night was merely a "dream" induced by the consumption of opium. However, as they gazed into each other's eyes, they soon realized it had been far from a mere dream. The drug had provided them with the impetus they needed, something they hadn't known they were missing.

Now came the difficult and most important part: retrieving the sword. Both of them knew, without needing to communicate it to each other, that without that sword, whatever they had between them would never fully blossom, at least not properly (especially in D'yaeb'l's case). They were two wounded souls, adrift in an ocean of uncertainty, in desperate need of a lifeline. Unfortunately, they couldn't share the one they possessed (particularly Putnam). The witcher understood this better than anyone. Although it may seem trivial, the medallion that had once belonged to Tubiel and was now in his hands had provided him with help and solace in many moments, giving him the strength to carry on. Therefore, he could easily empathize with her situation and was more than willing to help.

Retrieving the sword would indeed prove difficult as the Khanum was not easily convinced, and Putnam was cautious about provoking a diplomatic conflict that could jeopardize the rest of the expedition. Nonetheless, he held onto a strong belief in their eventual success, even though he recognized it would require a considerable amount of time and unwavering patience. Despite knowing that

patience wasn't typically a virtue associated with D'yaeb'l, he had faith that she would make the effort, driven not only by her connection with him but also by her deep devotion to Kristov. However, this belief of Putnam's would prove to be another instance of his naivety, causing him to miss the larger picture. D'yaeb'l was more broken than he could fathom, and despair had woven itself so tightly into her being that shaking it off would prove to be an immense challenge.

As the days passed, the Irbis and the Golden Griffin continued to meet, taking on contracts together, planning their strategy to recover the weapon, and finding solace in each other's presence within the sanctuary of the luxurious inn rooms accessible to Putnam. Their bond, though not openly affirmed in words, deepened and grew stronger.

Due to the circumstances and taking
advantage of Putnam's status, they opted

for a diplomatic approach. Both of them would go to the Khanum's residence, attempt to speak with her, establish a friendship, and gradually earn her trust in order to acquire the sword. Despite Putnam's decent income, they didn't have a large sum of money to purchase it, as the sword was considered an exotic item in that region with an exorbitant price tag, typical of such rare objects. This strategy yielded mixed results because neither of them knew the true nature of the Khanum. Unbeknownst to them, she was a Higher Vampire with a severe condition similar to alcoholism in humans, but centered around blood. Consequently, she harbored a certain apprehension towards the witches.

In the end, due to their persistence, the Khanum Tuya agreed to invite them to a dinner (although only Putnam, given his status) to discuss the matter of the sword and their reasons for wanting to acquire it. Their unwavering determination had sparked her curiosity. She considered it to be just another sword, a witcher sword (something highly unique in Haakland), but merely a sword nevertheless. She didn't believe it held such significance for anyone.

They deliberated on it for a day (well, Putnam did, while D'yaeb'l insisted that he accept, which he eventually did). It deviated from their original plan, but they regarded it as progress given the effort they had invested. They saw it as an opportunity to formulate a well-crafted plan to steal the sword. Both of them understood that, despite Putnam's charisma, it was impossible for Tuya to simply hand over the sword due to its uniqueness in the country. Moreover, during their persistent requests, D'yaeb'l had taken the opportunity to study the Khanum's residence and believed she knew the location where the sword, once

given to her by her beloved Kristov, was kept.

As the days went by, their anticipation grew, and their plan became more refined. D'yaebel would take on the crucial role of executing the theft, utilizing her skills and expertise to navigate the challenges that lay ahead. Putnam, on the other hand, would assume the task of diverting Tuya's attention during the dinner, skillfully extending the evening to create a relaxed atmosphere where suspicions wouldn't arise. The goal was to give D'yaebel ample time to retrieve the sword without any haste or doubt, allowing her to carry out the operation with precision.

Putnam capitalized on his connection with Zeus, leveraging it to secure traditional elegant clothing that would seamlessly blend with the local customs and traditions. He dedicated himself to understanding every detail of the dining etiquette, ensuring that his performance during the dinner would be flawless. This level of preparation was vital to maintaining Tuya's trust and preventing any suspicions from arising.

Meanwhile, D'yaebel meticulously fine-tuned her equipment, making necessary upgrades to enhance her stealth and agility. She knew that a successful theft required precision and adaptability. Every piece of her gear was carefully examined and optimized to ensure the utmost effectiveness. She was ready to navigate the Khanum's residence swiftly and silently, relying on her extensive training and resourcefulness to retrieve the coveted sword.

Finally, the day of the dinner arrived, and both of them set their plan in motion. Initially, everything went smoothly, although Putnam felt slightly uncomfortable in the presence of the imposing Tuya. However, he quickly adjusted and matched her demeanor, showing confidence and composure. Utilizing his natural charisma and charm, he navigated the dinner with precision, effortlessly balancing the conversation and creating a relaxed atmosphere. The initial awkward silences were replaced by enjoyable and engaging discussions as the alcohol flowed freely. Putnam savored his arkhi, while Tuya indulged in Nilfgaardian wine, which was, in reality, the blood of her victims, primarily criminals.

Meanwhile, D'yaebel carried out her part of the plan with utmost precision, infiltrating the heavily guarded residence and methodically searching for the coveted sword. Her enhanced mutant senses, allowed her to track and locate the weapon with relative ease. After an intense search that spanned two hours, her

perseverance paid off, and she finally discovered the hidden whereabouts of the sword.

However, just as D'yaeb'l triumphantly laid her hands on the sword, a wave of dormant emotions surged within her, triggered by the potent combination of her Cat School mutations and the stress of the situation. In a moment of unfortunate timing, she overheard what seemed to be Putnam engaging in flirtatious banter with Tuya. Overwhelmed by a fierce jealousy that clouded her judgment, D'yaeb'l impulsively abandoned her mission to enact a desperate act of vengeance against the Khanum.

With her focus compromised and her thoughts consumed by irrational fury, D'yaeb'l's attempt to assassinate Tuya became a disastrous mistake. The skilled guards, loyal to the Khanum, swiftly intervened and apprehended her, preventing her from completing her ill-conceived plan. Bound and defeated, D'yaeb'l's fate was sealed as she was subsequently sold into slavery, destined to be transported to the southern city-state of Zerzura, infamous for its cruel treatment of captives.

Putnam desperately tried to intervene, using every means possible to convince Tuya that it had been a mistake. However, his efforts were in vain, and he couldn't save D'yaeb'l from her dreadful fate. Devastated by the loss of the Irbis, Putnam's heart sank as he witnessed D'yaeb'l being whisked away into the clutches of the slavers, her future now uncertain. But this would not be the end of their journey together. The bond forged between Putnam and D'yaeb'l would endure, setting the stage for a future filled with unforeseen challenges, unexpected alliances, and a chance at redemption.

"Unexpected" (early January - early February 1283)

After D'yaeb'l was punished for her attempted assassination of Tuya and sold as a slave, Putnam continued to meet with the Khanum, hoping and praying that D'yaeb'l would find a way to escape and return to him. The witcher, on his part, focused on reclaiming the sword from Tuya's possession, intending to eventually return it to Irbis. In a sense, he was still pursuing their original plan. However, little did he know that this course of action would lead to unforeseen consequences, although not necessarily of the worst kind.

These consequences would teach him another important lesson: that hedonism was not the solution if he wanted to improve and progress as a person, just as clinging to the past was not either (a lesson that D'yaeb'l had indirectly been

teaching him), as it would always drag him down. This, combined with the influence that Jolanta and later Marina had on him, would enable him to reach the point he had with Aine, as mentioned before, and indirectly give rise to the School of the Crane.

Putnam, as we have mentioned before, continued to meet with Tuya, attempting to charm her to obtain the sword. Once he succeeded, he would consider his visit to Haakgan concluded, as he doubted the expedition would stay in the country for much longer. They still had much of the world to explore and more trade agreements to sign. However, what initially appeared as a simple game to acquire the weapon ended up, unbeknownst to the witcher, becoming something more profound (despite his awareness of his nature as a witcher). Perhaps due to the events that had unfolded, he unintentionally let his guard down and allowed himself to be swept away by the situation.

The same applied to Tuya, who had harbored a disdain for witches, particularly those from the School of the Manticore, with whom she had crossed paths centuries ago. However, the Golden Griffin's natural charm surprised her and made her realize that her former adversaries were not so different from her after all (it is worth noting that Putnam was unaware of Tuya's true nature as a Higher Vampire at that time).

All of this occurred on a day like any other in the winter of Patyak. Putnam had been taking on contracts in the outskirts of the capital, and after completing them, he had made up his mind to pay her a visit. As the days went by and he got to know her better, that imposing figure, despite what had happened with D'yaebel, had transformed, not into a friend, but into something akin to one. She appeared to be an intriguing individual, brimming with nuances, who applied her values not only to her personal life but also to her role as the ruler of Patyak.

He took a bath, dressed up, and bought something on the way. It had become common for them to have lunches and dinners together. Initially, this reminded Putnam of his terrible experience with Herna, but he didn't refuse because he didn't want to put the expedition in a difficult situation. This fear, so to speak, gradually disappeared as they got to know each other more and genuinely felt comfortable in each other's presence.

That day, it was time for dinner, nothing out of the ordinary, but that dinner held something special that would leave both of them marked forever and would even allow the witcher to survive future events. The dinner, until approximately

the halfway point, proceeded in the standard manner. It would only be at the end when things would change because the witcher, being carried away by the side effects of his mutations, and Tuya, partly due to the exotic aura emitted by Putnam and his charm, which reminded her of one of her first husbands (the great-great-grandfather of Prince Zeus, to be more precise), ended up sharing a night of passion. This, which to Putnam simply seemed like a simple encounter as it had happened with D'yaebel and would happen in the near future with Aine, would lead to something more that would transform him, whether he desired it or not. Teaching him also, many lessons in addition to what has already been said, one of them, being how even the simplest moments can change someone, even if that person does not believe it.

The next day passed as if the previous night had not happened. Putnam got up, dressed himself, bid farewell to the guards as he usually did after meals, and set off to attend a few witcher contracts as usual. He also visited the expedition to see how their coexistence with the Great Khan was progressing, occasionally pondering the matter, particularly because of the issue of the sword. He was unsure if that encounter would complicate things when it came to retrieving it.

Tuya, on the other hand, did not become angry. She had too many years behind her to let such things bother her, more than five centuries to be precise. She simply continued with her work as a ruler while occasionally contemplating the subject. They both assumed they would discuss it, just to clarify matters, as it wasn't as if love had blossomed between them, but rather a kind of mutual understanding. That would happen, yet not happen simultaneously—it's complicated to explain.

Another aspect that influenced the unfolding of that passionate night was the passage of time. Seeing that Irbis did not return and gathering information about Zerzura, Putnam began to consider the possibility that she might be dead. However, he clung to a faint hope that this was not the case, and it was this hope that fueled his motivation to persist in his efforts to recover the sword.

Despite what had transpired between them, the routine of lunches and dinners between Putnam and Tuya persisted. Putnam was still driven by the task of obtaining what was once Kristov's gift to D'yaebel. While everything seemed to proceed as usual, the lingering thoughts from their night of passion continued to weigh on their minds. However, their routine would soon be disrupted in a shocking manner. As Putnam arrived at the residence in his customary manner, he immediately noticed Tuya's absence. Concerned, he inquired with the guards,

who revealed that Tuya had a tendency to visit her deceased husband in the days leading up to a Red Moon. Although this explanation seemed plausible and he could be erring on the side of "westernism" as the Haaklandians called the "superiority" mentality that the Nordlings sometimes felt, but he felt this was not the case and it did little to ease Putnam's growing unease.

Driven by a mixture of curiosity and worry, Putnam embarked on a search for Tuya, guided by his witcher abilities. The path led him through the city streets into the less secure parts where a trail of gruesome scenes unfolded before him. It became evident that Tuya was not human and that her true form was that of a Higher Vampire. She was in the midst of a blood rage, derived from a condition akin to alcoholism but in vampires, mercilessly slaughtering what could only be criminals and consuming their blood. This revelation added a new layer of understanding to some behaviors of their previous encounters.

Although Putnam prepared himself for a potential confrontation, wielding his silver sword and clutching a vial of Black Blood potion, his intention was not to engage in combat with Tuya. Despite her nature, he had no desire to kill her or neutralize her, knowing the abilities and complexities that Higher Vampires possessed, he had developed a profound empathy for her during their time together.

Approaching Tuya cautiously, Putnam aimed to reach out to her and ensure her well-being in the face of her bloodlust. The encounter was fraught with danger, with Tuya's formidable abilities posing a significant threat. However, driven by his understanding of her, Putnam mustered the courage to confront her despite the risks involved.

Their meeting was intense, a clash of wills and emotions. Putnam desperately sought to reason with Tuya and bring her back from the depths of her bloodlust. While he managed to avoid a fatal outcome, he did not emerge unscathed. Amidst the chaos, a glimmer of their connection remained. Despite Tuya's blood-fueled frenzy, she spared Putnam's life, leaving him badly injured but alive. It was a testament to the bond they shared, one that transcended the boundaries of their respective natures. This act of compassion and understanding would have a positive impact on the witcher near future as already mentioned.

After that encounter, Putnam spent several days recovering. It had been his first battle against a Higher Vampire, and miraculously, he had survived to tell the tale. He seized the opportunity to contemplate his next course of action. Should

he leave things as they were? Should he offer his help to Tuya?

It was true that if Tuya was only targeting criminals, as he had observed, she couldn't be entirely evil. In her own way, she was purging their society of a blight, even though her methods were questionable. However, when he recalled her gaze, the desperation in her eyes that night, and how addiction consumed her, Putnam felt an undeniable urge to intervene. He knew that sooner or later, she would exhaust the supply of criminals to slay. This would lead her "vampiric alcoholism" to escalate, potentially resulting in larger massacres. The ramifications would extend beyond her own well-being, endangering not only the city but also to Patyak and perhaps even the entirety of Haakgan.

It was an arduous task, incredibly challenging. Putnam found himself at a loss, unsure of how to proceed without neutralizing Tuya and ensuring the peace of Carasay, as well of Patyak and Haakgan, for at least 50 years while she regenerated. However, after much deliberation, he eventually discovered a solution, drawing on his experiences with the Black Seagull. While his own struggles were not remotely similar to Tuya's blood-related challenges and leaned more towards psychological aspects, they shared certain commonalities.

After finding the solution, he returned to Tuya, but not without being ready for a new combat just in case. He did not know how she would react if they met again. Surprisingly, she did not attack him, showing Putnam how wrong his prejudices against those beings were. Little by little, they began to connect more, developing what could now be considered a fleeting romance, although it was never made clear. It would be in that time where they would taught each other different lessons, some of them mentioned earlier, that would help them grow as conscious beings (and with Tuya, it was difficult due to her age). Being the most notable lessons the one about hedonism and that finding the middle ground was the right path to follow. Imbalance, no matter how "good" it may seem, only ends up leading to disaster eventually.

For all that Putnam went through, obviously, like so many other lessons that shaped him, it would take time for them to blossom, but they would eventually take effect, making him the very different, wise, and at peace man that he would be when the era of the School of the Crane arrived.

After that, time passed, and the moment came for their departure expedition. As a result, Tuya and Putnam had to bid each other farewell. It was a melancholic moment, yet one they had anticipated. Tuya, filled with gratitude for all the

assistance Putnam had provided, decided to gift him the sword, thereby fulfilling his long-awaited objective. In addition, she made a promise to him that if, by chance, their paths crossed again, she would be there to support him in any way he needed. Putnam had done her a tremendous favor after a prolonged struggle, and it was only fitting that she reciprocated it to the best of her ability.

In search of mythical realms (early 1283)

After leaving Haakgan the expedition continued traveling, keeping a southeasterly direction with the objective of reaching supposedly mythical lands like Buyan, not only to find out if they were true or not, but also for the aforementioned commercial treaties they wanted to achieve, they already had one (because, while Putnam had been killing monsters and dealing with other issues, like Tuya), the coexistence of the expedition with the Khan, gave its fruits, and this broke the monopoly that Redania had to sell the Haaki silk in the Northern Kingdoms, making the expeditionaries on behalf of the kingdom of Lyria and Rivia, get a juicy trade agreement, as they had promised to Meve, but they needed more.

Passing through Zerrikania, despite Putnam's personal reservations due to the events of 1278, served two crucial purposes. Firstly, it provided a more reliable means of verifying the existence of these territories, relying on sources beyond Nordling legends or the word of the Mardu within the expedition. Secondly, it was an unavoidable passage to maintain their planned route, avoiding significant alterations that would have resulted in a substantial increase in travel time. In fact, they opted to travel by ship along the Kerulen River, effectively cutting several weeks off their journey.

And it was in Zerrikania where the expedition would gain a new member, Lukasz, nicknamed the "Lion of Temeria," another witcher and one of the last remnants of the extinct School of the Wolf. After the official dissolution and subsequent extinction of the school in 1273 following Vesemir's death, Lukasz ventured to the Eastern Realm without originally intending to settle there, but eventually found a home. Lukasz proved to be a valuable addition, serving not only as support or a substitute in case something happened to Putnam but also as a mentor for the Griffin. With a 25-year age difference and, consequently, a significant gap in their respective careers, Lukasz had much to offer. While he may not have been as skilled in some areas as Putnam, due to his training under Vesemir, who was primarily a fencing instructor, Lukasz was highly

knowledgeable when it came to monsters. Furthermore, after nearly a decade of living in Zerrikania, he had acquired a wealth of knowledge, making him not only a valuable asset in slaying unknown and dangerous monsters but also as a guide, translator, and much more. In fact, it was Lukasz himself who served as confirmation that realms like [Buyan](#) existed. During their process of replenishing materials and supplies, he introduced them to merchants from those lands, providing irrefutable evidence of their existence.

Valkare

Truth be told, the expeditions suited Putnam very well. Not only did they allow him to step out of his comfort zone and grow in all aspects, but they also provided a respite from his internal demons. Being in unknown territories made him more focused on the well-being of the group and the dangers that might arise, rather than on himself. This caused symptoms of his post-traumatic stress disorder, such as avoidance and negative thoughts, to temporarily disappear, and others like intrusive memories or bursts of anger (which, when they occurred, were often directed towards Istredd) to diminish. Occasionally, he still had nightmares, but everyone was so exhausted at the end of each day's journey that his mind couldn't afford to dwell on them. Also he could channel his anger by confronting the monsters they encountered along the way.

However, Lukasz would try to help his fellow witcher (having been influenced by Adalwulf and his compassion during Lukasz's training, where they met) by sharing tips and tricks that Adalwulf had offered to Vesemir to deal with the psychological aftermath of the Kaer Morhen Massacre. Unfortunately, these suggestions only led to minor improvements. Nonetheless, Putnam couldn't help but express his gratitude in his own way, which would become evident at the end of their journey through the Far East.

After leaving the land of dragons behind,
they journeyed through Valkare, a country
that bordered Zerrikania to the south and had been relatively recently
established. Valkare was once a part of the aforementioned country, and its
population consisted mainly of dissidents to the rule of the sorceress queen and
their families. Conflict frequently arose on the border, which was closely
monitored by foreign mercenaries hired by the queen to prevent new dissidents
from fleeing to the neighboring country.

It would be in this country where the expedition would encounter its first major

conflict. Despite their desire to continue towards the yet unknown Buyan, they were compelled to intervene, albeit reluctantly. The situation complicated their passage, and as foreigners, they were met with suspicion and distrust. There were concerns that they could be spies employed by the Zerrikanian Crown, disguising themselves as travelers to facilitate a future attack.

The conflict, was a conflict between the progressive and closed-minded factions, it was a complex and nuanced struggle, shaping the path of the expedition and their interaction with the country of Valkare. It went beyond mere disagreements; it was a clash of ideals, visions for the future, and the very essence of the nation.

The closed-minded factions held onto the belief that Valkare should remain a haven solely for dissidents from Zerrikania. They aimed to maintain the status quo and saw their country as a sanctuary, patiently waiting for the sorceress queen's demise to reunite with their motherland. Their focus was on preserving the existing structure and identity, built over a short span of a few decades.

On the other hand, the progressive factions harbored concerns and fears about the vulnerability of Valkare. They understood the potential threat posed by Zerrikania and recognized the need for proactive measures to safeguard their people. They advocated for opening up the nation, seeking alliances with other powers, improving infrastructure, and nurturing a robust national identity that could withstand external challenges. They recognized that the sorceress queen's magical longevity meant waiting for her demise was not a viable long-term strategy.

The clash between these factions presented a complex dilemma for the expedition. Both sides had valid arguments, making it difficult to discern the right course of action. It required a delicate balance between respecting the sovereignty and aspirations of the Valkarean people and ensuring the expedition's safe passage towards the mysterious realm of Buyan and with luck, get a new commercial agreement for the kingdom that they were representing.

The time they spent in Valkare, in part, delayed them a bit, but on the other hand, it indirectly led them to where they ultimately ended up. The first thing they did was to try to earn the trust of the people before attempting to influence local politics in order to continue their journey. To accomplish this, they enlisted the skills of Lukasz and Putnam, having both witchers fight against desert monsters that threatened the population.

Valkare was a very impoverished and precarious country, where people lived in conditions reminiscent of desert tribes. Their cities were what Zerrikania would consider small villages. Therefore, if they truly wanted to gain the trust of the locals, to be allowed passage, and hopefully secure more benefits for the kingdom of Lyria and Rivia, there was no better way to start. Both witches completed a total of 36 jobs, with each of them doing 12 solo missions and 12 as a team.

These tasks served multiple purposes. Not only did they showcase the witches' combat skills and their dedication to protecting the people, but they also helped improve the perception of the expedition among the Valkarean population. As Lukasz and Putnam successfully eliminated the desert monsters, word spread about their heroic deeds, and trust began to grow.

Their efforts to assist the locals and make a positive impact went beyond simply completing contracts. Lukasz and Putnam took the time to interact with the Valkarean people, listening to their concerns and learning about their way of life. This genuine engagement helped bridge the cultural divide and fostered a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding.

Another factor that contributed to the growing trust (taking advantage of the impact generated by Lukasz and Putnam, of course) to the point where they could intervene in local politics was the contribution of the expedition's mages, specifically Istredd and Eberhatt, accompanied by Fabio, who, although not a mage, was equally helpful. Their contribution was seemingly simple yet significant: healing.

Both mages, well-versed in the art of healing, began to treat the people of the region, assisted by some local healers whose knowledge was limited. Through this collaboration and the exchange of knowledge, the overall health of the population improved. It was common for expert healers attempting to flee to Valkare to be discovered and killed, making the presence of Istredd, Eberhatt, and Fabio invaluable in providing much-needed healing and medical assistance.

The mages' actions went beyond physical healing. They also offered comfort and solace to those who had suffered traumas and psychological distress, including survivors of past conflicts and persecution. By providing both physical and emotional support, Istredd, Eberhatt, and Fabio established a deep sense of trust and gratitude within the local population.

Their efforts did not go unnoticed. News of the mages' healing capabilities

spread throughout the region, reaching even the most remote villages. The impact of their actions resonated deeply, as people who had previously lost hope found a glimmer of it in the form of healing and care. This, in turn, further solidified the expedition's reputation and facilitated their involvement in local politics.

With the trust of the population gained, after many days, they were finally able to engage in the politics of the country and intervene. As it was evident, they aligned themselves with those who would benefit them the most: the more progressive factions. However, they also sought to strike a balance to avoid, for example, inciting a civil war. It was not their intention. By aligning themselves strategically, they not only secured unhindered passage but also potentially negotiated a trade agreement on behalf of Lyria and Rivia that would benefit both Valkare and the northern kingdom.

Their intervention in local politics was carefully calculated. They engaged in diplomatic discussions and negotiations, using their influence and expertise to mediate between the conflicting factions. Understanding the delicate situation, they aimed to find common ground and bridge the gap between the closed-minded and progressive groups.

Recognizing the importance of stability and unity, the expedition emphasized the benefits of collaboration and cooperation. They highlighted how opening up to the world and establishing trade relations could lead to economic growth, improved living conditions, and a more prosperous future for Valkare. By presenting a vision that aligned with the aspirations of the progressive factions, they garnered support and built alliances within the political landscape.

Their ultimate goal was to establish a mutually beneficial agreement that would not only facilitate the expedition's journey but also lay the foundation for a long-lasting partnership between Valkare and Lyria and Rivia. Through skillful negotiation and diplomacy, they aimed to ensure that the trade agreement addressed the needs and interests of both parties, fostering economic prosperity and strengthening diplomatic ties.

The successful intervention in Valkare's politics not only secured the expedition's passage but also set the stage for a promising alliance. By leveraging their influence and aligning themselves with the progressive factions, they positioned Lyria and Rivia as valuable partners and opened doors for future collaborations.

With the trade agreement in place, Valkare would have the opportunity to

expand its economy, benefit from the resources and expertise of Lyria and Rivia, and foster greater stability and prosperity within its borders. The expedition's involvement in local politics proved to be a catalyst for positive change, paving the way for a stronger relationship between the two nations.

As they continued their journey, the expedition would carry the goodwill and support of Valkare with them. The diplomatic success achieved in the country would serve as a testament to their ability to navigate complex political landscapes and forge alliances for the betterment of all involved.

Oponskoye

After achieving success in Valkare, the journey continued southward, and the expedition made its way to the Kingdom of Oponskoye (or Opona in its native language). They initially believed it to be nothing more than a myth, originating from the early encounters between Zangvebarian merchants and Nordlings. However, to their surprise, the kingdom was real. It didn't possess the exaggerated wealth or happiness depicted in tales, nor was it located at the edge of the flatness of the world, but it undeniably existed. It was in Oponskoye that they first heard about the [Tuyotuki Islands](#), information that would later prove to be valuable to them.

The Kingdom of Oponskoye was an ancient kingdom, very ancient indeed. It was not a kingdom of human or other non-human races but rather elven, specifically [Aen'Agde](#). There were some human populations included, but they were fairly well tolerated, unlike in the west or in other worlds such as that of the Aen Elle. Primarily, Mardu who had come into contact with these elves and, for various reasons, had ended up being integrated, along with their half-elf descendants after some time.

In Oponskoye, they were warmly received and treated, aligning with the legends told about the country. This was a relief after successfully dealing with the mistrust in Valkare. For the expedition, everything went smoothly, except for their inability to secure another trade treaty. The Aen'Agde, despite not being directly involved, held a certain wariness towards Western humans in a more general sense, influenced by Isengrim's visit and his stories. They feared that increased interaction with Western humans would lead to their downfall. Ironically, the kingdom would eventually fall into the hands of those very Eastern humans they claimed to tolerate and believed were superior to their Western counterparts, specifically the Haaki Empire led by Zeus during the 14th century.

As for Putnam, his experience was somewhat similar but on a personal level. During their time in the country, the witcher once again found love. Unfortunately, it ended in a tragic manner. This, combined with other factors that would occur later on, resulted in a setback in his mental healing process.

This woman was none other than Nabla, a Mardu woman who belonged to the diplomatic corps of Oponskoye. He met her shortly after arriving in the kingdom, and they quickly formed a strong bond, becoming good friends in that place. She was a cultured and stunning woman, surpassing even the cultural standards of the Mardu or Aen'Agde. Nabla was also intelligent, proficient in multiple languages, including the Common Tongue Nordling (although with a slight accent). However, as the days passed, their friendship, which had initially seemed innocent and purely platonic, evolved into something more, driven by the mutual physical attraction they felt for each other, thus becoming lovers. This is no small feat considering that among all elven groups (already known for their beauty), the Aen'Agde were considered one of the most breathtaking, rivaled perhaps only by the Aen Elle.

Together, they not only worked on various monster contracts, particularly those that threatened the Aen'Agde's crops, monsters which the Nordlings believed to be mere myths (as Nabla, like Indira in the past, had to act as a translator). They also learned a great deal from each other, not only on a personal level (as in the case of Tuya) but also in cultural and professional aspects. Speaking of the personal aspect, Nabla taught the witcher the lesson of accepting change and flowing with it, much like the waves of the sea. However, as life often does, circumstances made him wait before fully applying that lesson.

Their connection grew so strong that, although they were not officially a couple, Putnam came close to considering settling in the country for her. Following local traditions, he even contemplated the possibility of marrying again, with Nabla potentially becoming his second wife. However, this scenario did not come to pass due to the tragedy that befell the witcher in that quasi-perfect realm.

This tragic turn of events unfolded when the truth was unveiled: Nabla, the woman whom Putnam had come to love, was, in fact, a first-generation werecat struggling to control her curse for only a few months. Despite her best efforts, including strategies such as hiding on the outskirts during full moon nights, the unpredictable nature of her instincts would sometimes take over. Inadvertently, she would find herself attacking villages in search of sustenance, accompanied

by the loyal cougars she had formed a bond with in her cat form.

Fate had a cruel twist in store for both Putnam and Nabla. While immersed in a contract in one of the villages, Putnam unexpectedly encountered Nabla in her feral form. Oblivious to her true identity, he initially approached her with the intention of finding a way to cure her affliction. However, as he witnessed firsthand the extent of her extreme aggression and untamed ferocity, he soon realized that lifting the curse was beyond his capabilities at that moment. The safety of the villagers became his paramount concern, compelling him to defend them against Nabla's relentless onslaught.

In the face of imminent danger, driven by his instincts for survival and the protection of innocents, Putnam clashed with the formidable monster. Engaged in a desperate struggle, he fought valiantly against the menacing werecat, every blow dealt in the shadows of unawareness, unaware of the true identity of his opponent. Tragically, the clash culminated in a fatal blow, sealing the grim fate that had befallen Nabla, forever entwined with the heartbreakingly loss that the witcher would experience soon after. Unbeknownst to him, he had unknowingly extinguished the life of his beloved, only realizing the gravity of his actions when Nabla began to regain her human form after her death.

As the realization washed over him, Putnam watched in anguish as another chance for happiness sputtered before his eyes, shattered by his own hands. He questioned whether he had done the right thing, haunted by the thought that he may be "cursed", destined never to be loved again. The weight of new guilt and sorrow bore down upon his already tired shoulders, casting a shadow over his soul. More doubt and self-blame gnawed at his conscience, leaving him to grapple with the devastating consequences of his actions.

The Golden Griffin vs The Biscoro (Eastern Barsa)

"You call me a monster, Pitch? Good. It means I'm doing my job right."

—Brehen shortly before dueling with Putnam

A few days after the tragedy that befell Putnam with Nabla, the expedition resumed its journey to reach Buyan, having to pass through Barsa, more specifically Eastern Barsa, or as it was once known in Nilfgaardian history before its relatively unified status, the Southern Kingdoms or Taifas.

Barsa, at that time, had been an unstable area for a long time. However, despite this, they experienced relative tranquility as they were not caught in the midst of

any major political conflict, unlike the previously mentioned Valkare, even though it was not physical or violent. It is worth noting that this was due to Putnam's actions in Ofir, which, even after 5 years, were still remembered and disseminated throughout the territories of Ofir and its influenced regions, including Eastern Barsa. As a result, they were able to secure a new trade treaty, in exchange for the support of Lyria and Rivia to this part of the region, alongside Hannu and Ofir.

Still, it must be said that they did experience some conflict, albeit on a much smaller scale. For the expedition, it was something they hadn't anticipated, and for Putnam, it was a haunting reminder of a loved one from his past who unexpectedly visited him in ways he had never imagined. It felt as if it were a cruel yet undeniable sign that she was still alive.

And this conflict began with the massacres that started happening in the area around halfway through their time in the region. These massacres, upon investigation, were discovered to be committed by witchers. More specifically, witchers from the [School of the Tiger](#) (although calling them a school was a stretch, as they were more like a band of ruthless mercenaries).

To provide better context, the "school," if we can even call it that, of the Tiger was the ultimate representation of how far a witcher can fall. If the School of the Cat was already known as a destination for witchers exiled from other schools due to their highly questionable actions, Guxart stands out as a notable example. He originally belonged to the School of the Griffin but ended up joining the School of the Cat. The "school" of the Tiger, so to speak, consisted of the outcasts among outcasts, a group that gradually came together over time. Since already mentioned, even the morally ambiguous Cats had their own sense of justice and there were limits that not even they dared to cross, thing that these exiles, among the exiles, had done.

This "school" was composed of Luka, originally a witcher from the School of the Wolf, who survived the Kaer Morhen Massacre while he was on The Path. He was a close friend of Vesemir but eventually committed acts that the leader of the surviving Wolves strongly disapproved of, leading to his exile, despite the deep pain it caused due to their closeness. Luka joined the School of the Cat but was also expelled. It is believed that Luka may have been the founder of this "school"/group.

Chireadan, a witcher from the [School of the Raven](#), was also exiled and joined

the School of the Cat but was expelled again shortly before the fall of Dyn Marv, becoming a Tiger. Dermont Marranga, another exiled Wolf (believed to have gone through a similar experience as Luka), Clovis (similar to the aforementioned Wolves), Gwidon, a witcher from the School of the Cat expelled shortly before the fall of Dyn Marv, Thornwald, another witcher from the School of the Cat, and finally, Brehen, who needs no introduction. Brehen ultimately became the leader by seeking out this group, joining them, and killing Luka while he slept.

The expedition, driven by goodwill towards the government of Eastern Barsa and with the advantage of having two witchers at their disposal, along with specialized offensive magic mages, embarked on a mission to investigate the massacres that were occurring in strategic places. Eventually, they made a startling discovery: the culprits behind these brutal acts were not ordinary monsters or common assassins but other witchers.

Putnam and Lukasz speculated that the witchers responsible belonged to the School of the Cat, as it seemed the most logical explanation. However, the School had long been disbanded, and many of the Cat witchers carried bounties on their heads. Moreover, upon examining the crime scenes, it became apparent that the level of execution was far beyond what a Cat witcher would typically engage in. While the Cat witchers were known for their ruthless nature, their acts of violence were often driven by self-defense or uncontrolled emotions. What they were witnessing now was something far more calculated and sadistic.

At that moment, the reason behind these massacres remained unknown. However, the expedition deduced that it couldn't simply be a matter of personal satisfaction or revenge; there had to be a significant contractor orchestrating these events. The presence of an influential person or organization behind the scenes became a reasonable assumption, given the precision and sophistication displayed in the execution of these atrocities. It seemed as if they not only wanted to destabilize the region, but also to cause fear in the population something that only someone interested in controlling the area would do.

And so, the days went by. During this time, both Lukasz and Putnam, along with the mages, dedicated themselves to thoroughly studying the massacres and learning the patterns in order to surprise the perpetrators and capture them, or more likely, kill them.

To handle the problem more effectively, they divided into two groups. One group was composed of Stucco and Lukasz, while the other consisted of Zavist and

Putnam. This arrangement paired both offensive mages with the two witches, rather than having the witches go solo while the mages went separately. It was a balanced approach that minimized the risk to the Wolf and the Griffin, and to a lesser extent, the mages. Furthermore, these individuals were invaluable members of the expedition, and losing any of them would be detrimental, especially considering the significant progress they had already made in their journey through the Far East.

Stucco and Lukasz surprised a portion of the Tigers in a nocturnal attack. As they had also split up to carry out the massacres, they confronted Chireadan, Dermont Marranga, and Clovis. In the process, they killed Chireadan and Dermont, leaving only Clovis alive, who revealed to them the reason behind their actions. In summary, they had been hired by the Nilfgaardian government (which supported Western Barsa) to destabilize Eastern Barsa and ultimately unite the entire region under their influence. Afterward, Lukasz spared Clovis' life and told him that if he redeemed himself for everything he had done, he would let him live in peace. However, if Lukasz discovered that Clovis returned to the path of wrongdoing, he would seek him out and kill him.

As a curiosity, it was Lukasz who dubbed these rogue witches as "*Witches of the School of Tiger*" upon seeing their roughly modified medallions of the School of the Cat, which vaguely resembled the creature brought by the Ofieri during their significant contact with the Northen Kingdoms back in 1272.

Putnam and Zavist, on the other hand, took on the task of confronting Gwidon and Thornwald, catching them off guard in a dawn attack. They engaged in an intense duel, ultimately killing both of them. Before their demise, Putnam and Zavist managed to extract the revelation of their leader's identity. And it was none other than Brehen, infamously known as the Cat of Iello, now more widely recognized as the Biscoro due to the heightened sadism and brutality he had embraced (and that says a lot, coming from Brehen). A chill ran down Putnam's spine. Brehen, the witcher who had crossed the line between witcher and monster. Brehen, the tutor of D'yaebel, the one who had stripped her of her humanity. Yes, it was that very Brehen. It was as if, in that very moment, the Irbis whispered to Putnam through the mention of his master, letting him know that she was still alive.

He contemplated discussing it with Fabio and moving on to their next objective in their journey. It was better not to get involved in that mess, especially since they had already caused significant harm by killing the former Cat of Iello's

comrades. But of course, it was Brehen. Even when alone, he could unleash complete disasters, just as he did in that massacre. In the end, he chose to confront him; it was the only viable option. He would likely die in the process, but it was preferable to have that outcome rather than more innocent people suffering at the hands of cruelty. Nilfgaard would probably send others to try to destabilize the area, but at least it wouldn't be Brehen. And that, in itself, was a victory.

Brehen, when it came to the massacres, had gone his own way, living up to the infamous title he earned in Iello. Putnam and Zavist discussed it and decided that the best course of action was for Putnam to confront him. It seemed a bit crazy, and in part, it was. But the Griffin had a plan that just might work. If he had survived D'yaebel, he was confident he could survive her master. Besides, he believed in second chances and thought that perhaps he could lead Brehen onto a different path despite all the years of causing pain and suffering. If D'yaebel was, to some extent, a reflection of the former Cat of Iello, he was sure that there was still some humanity left in Brehen. How wrong he was.

So, without further ado, he set off on his search. And just as D'yaebel had done with Putnam in 1280, he followed the traces of death left behind until he finally found him. Discovering him in the ancient ruins that served as a hideout for the "school" of the Tiger in that arid region of the Continent.

Surprisingly for the Golden Griffin, Brehen recognized him. He had heard a lot about Putnam in that area of Barsa due to the Ofiri influence, and as always, those two-colored eyes were unmistakable. Brehen hated him, hated him immensely. A Griffin, and that hatred only increased upon hearing about his exploits. All the hypocrisy that the former Cat of Iello attributed to all the witcher schools, accumulated in one school and in one person.

Putnam, as he had planned, attempted to reason with Brehen, hoping to awaken some dormant humanity within him, just as he had done with his pupil, and thus prevent Fabio's assassination. However, it proved to be a futile endeavor, as by the time Putnam realized it, Brehen had already unsheathed his steel sword and was advancing towards him.

The clash between Putnam and Brehen escalated into an all-out battle, each pouring every ounce of strength and skill into their strikes and defenses. The air crackled with tension as their swords clashed and sparks flew in the ancient ruins that served as the Tiger School's hideout in the barren region of Barsa.

Despite Putnam's initial advantage, Brehen's fury and determination knew no bounds. His attacks were relentless, fueled by a deep-rooted hatred and a thirst for inflicting pain. Putnam fought valiantly, countering blow after blow, but the toll of the prolonged fight began to wear him down. Fatigue gnawed at his muscles, threatening to undermine his precision and speed.

Brehen sensed the shift in momentum and pressed his advantage. Blow after blow rained down upon Putnam, his defenses crumbling under the relentless assault. The Biscoro reveled in his dominance, savoring every moment of Putnam's suffering. It seemed as if victory was within Brehen's grasp.

Yet, in his sadistic revelry, Brehen committed a fatal error. He underestimated Putnam's resilience and the depth of his resolve. As the Biscoro closed in, ready to deliver the finishing blow by tightening his silver chain around Putnam's throat, the golden opportunity emerged. Drawn into close quarters, Putnam's mind raced; memories of D'yaebel flooded his thoughts, reminding him of the bond they shared and the lessons learned. It was in this pivotal moment that clarity struck.

As the Biscoro lunged forward to deliver the final, crushing blow, his silver chain poised to choke the life out of Putnam, the golden Griffin seized the moment. With lightning speed and unwavering accuracy, he snatched one of Brehen's own daggers from his belt and thrust it deep into the witcher's heart, delivering a decisive and fatal strike.

Time seemed to stand still as the blade pierced Brehen's chest, and a mix of shock and realization flickered in his eyes. The once-feared Witcher of the Cat School, and later on, the Tiger, now lay defeated, his life extinguished by one of the many weapons he had wielded to bring pain and suffering to others. The battle was over, and Putnam stood as the victor, his heart heavy with the weight of the encounter.

As the dust settled and the echoes of their clash faded, Putnam couldn't help but feel a pang of bittersweet triumph. The menace that had haunted the Northern Kingdoms and later Barsa with his savage massacres was finally vanquished. However, deep within him, there lingered a sense of regret and sorrow. The scars of their encounter would forever be etched upon his soul. Drawing from his experiences with felines, Putnam had hoped to save Brehen from his evil ways, but sadly, that had not been the case. Thus, those remnants of naivety that Putnam had still clung to after Tubiel's death shattered once and for all. He

realized that sometimes he couldn't save people because they themselves rejected second chances.

The Oasis (Spring of 1283)

"It is said that in Hannu, their rulers are so wealthy and powerful that enormous tombs are built in their honor, which, despite millennia passing, still endure. Can you imagine something like that for a Nordling king? Oh, Radovid would surely spare no expense in constructing a magnificent tomb, befitting his grandeur... or rather, befitting his inflated ego. Perhaps he would even commission a troupe of bards to sing endless praises of his greatness for all eternity. After all, what better way to ensure his legacy than with an ostentatious monument that exclaims, 'Behold my unparalleled importance!' Ah, the marvels of vanity and excessive self-importance never cease to astound"

—Istredd during the expedition voyage to [Hannu](#)

The next goal of the expedition was [Hannu](#), an objective they had not planned but which arose on the spur of the moment after hearing more about that country, even if they were merely better founded rumors. Hannu, nevertheless, was a land somewhat known to the Nordlings, though not entirely (Yennefer had been there in her day, specifically in the Nilfgaardian trading colony of Taremu). To reach their destination, they boarded a ship from the eastern coast of Barsa, where they were located, and set sail. The journey took them only about three days, aided by favorable winds and other factors, including the proximity between the two territories, until they arrived at Zaru, the coastal city and capital of the country.

During the voyage, Putnam once again demonstrated why he would be the future founder of the School of the Crane alongside Jolanta, as he took charge of dealing with several sea monsters that threatened to sink the ship they were on. Meanwhile, Lukasz was responsible for handling Vodyanoi attacks on deck, fighting alongside the mages.

The expedition's journey to Hannu, apart from better documenting the country, was obviously aimed at establishing a alliance and trade agreement between Lyria and Rivia and this nation. It was said, and not without reason, that Hannu, despite its incredibly hostile climate, with civilization flourishing only in the region known as the "Tears of Heru" (where two powerful rivers originating from the "[Free Lands](#)" flowed), was a highly powerful country with an ancient history predating even the Dauk and Wozgor in the North or the Markee in Ebbing. It was

governed by "god-kings" known as "menes" in the Hannuan language—wise and just rulers who possessed a greater mastery of magic than any sorcerer in the Northern Kingdoms or Nilfgaard.

Securing an alliance and trade agreement with Hannu would not only enhance Lyria and Rivia's standing but also provide a counterbalance to Radovid V's expansionist ambitions, thus safeguarding the kingdom of Meve.

In the land of the menes, they searched for a Nilfgaardian guide who could speak the language of the country (as there were many of them along the coast, especially in the aforementioned trading colony) and help them to reach their first objective. Their goal was to secure an audience with the menes known as Meriamón III, which proved to be quite challenging due to the divine status attributed to the menes in the country. However, they eventually succeeded. This achievement came to pass when Putnam and Lukasz saved the life of the high priest of one of the temples located on the outskirts of the capital. They defeated a serpopard that threatened the priest's life. As this priest had direct contact with the menes, he arranged an audience with the "god-king" as a gesture of gratitude and payment for saving his life and dispatching the monster. Such an audience was considered the utmost honor in Hannu, and only a select few foreigners were granted such a privilege. Notable examples of these privileged individuals included rulers like the Emperors of Nilfgaard or the Malliqs of Ofir.

After having learned all the protocol matters, they finally had the opportunity to meet with Meriamón III, and in the process, they discovered why he was revered as a deity (besides Hannuan traditions). The place where he lived was truly spectacular, on par with several things Putnam had seen in Ofir. This, combined with the monarch's exceptional talent for magic, made him appear practically godlike in the eyes of both foreigners and nationals. They were apprehensive about making constant mistakes, as Meriamón was as imposing, if not more so, than the Great Khan. However, in the end, everything went smoothly as Meriamón developed a fondness for Fabio Sachs, Istredd, Monga, and Putnam. This allowed everyone to relax, and Meriamón was open to listening to what these foreigners had to offer.

After a while of conversation and questioning, Meriamón agreed to sign their proposal for trade agreement / alliance but asked for several favors in return. He needed to make sure that they were genuinely honorable men who would

uphold their word. Failing to do so would potentially put Hannu at even greater risk by aligning with another foreign power hostile to Nilfgaard.

Stucco, Zavist, The Explorer, and Eberhatt were assigned to investigate whether the Nilfgaardian ambassador had been responsible for financing recently suppressed rebel groups. Meriamón had suspicions that Emperor Emhyr might be planning to initiate a war against the country and annex it as another province, in an attempt to leave a powerful legacy for the empire before his death (Emhyr would die in 1290).

Lukasz was tasked with dealing with a recently discovered cult that was believed to be responsible for the murders of several priests. The cultists had fled to the desert, and Lukasz had to find them and bring them back to face trial.

Fabio, Istredd, and Monga, on the other hand, would be providing support by staying in the capital and making the most of their time at what the Hannuans called the "Lair of Thot" (translated from their original language). It was an important library that once rivaled that of Nilfgaard. They would study and understand the knowledge preserved there in order to better assist their companions in their respective tasks. Additionally, they would try to make copies of any valuable texts they could find to bring them back to the North.

And what about Putnam? Well, Putnam was assigned a rather standard task compared to what the others were given, but he didn't complain. His task was simply to rid Hannu of monster infestations. The Mazoi, who would have handled such tasks in the past, had lost many men to these creatures and were unable to cope (in the past, a witcher from the [School of the Rhino](#) or the [School of the Scorpion](#) would have been assigned this task, despite the Mazoi's reluctance, but they were extinct).

Putnam was provided with a moreli (a larger relative of the Ofiri camel) as a mount to navigate the country more effectively, along with other resources such as a translator and a guide. However, fortunately, with Putnam's proficiency in Ofiri and his intuition, he didn't need them and was able to manage on his own. The Ofiri and Hannuan languages were mutually understandable to about 60% extent.

Once everything was ready, each member of the expedition went to fulfill the tasks assigned to them in order to demonstrate to Meriamón that they were indeed people of their word and thus secure the menes signature on the agreement/alliance.

Although some monsters posed more challenges than anticipated for Putnam, mainly due to their unfamiliarity to him, and that the Hannuan people knowledge regarding these creatures was limited. Most of the information available consisted of rumors and legends regarding how to defeat them. The most reliable and current insights came from the Mazoi and their experiences. This scarcity of knowledge was a result of the valuable information about these monsters being predominantly held by the School of the Rhino, which had long since fallen, leading to its near-complete loss. This event had occurred centuries ago.

Putnam engaged in repeated fights against monsters like the serpopard and faced new adversaries such as the xiphis, choiros, apepi, and sivathero. Although the sivathero turned out to be harmless, displaying behavior similar to a selkiemore, so Putnam guided it to a safer location to cease its disturbance to the Hannuans. He also resolved contracts that initially appeared to involve monsters but proved otherwise, such as when he aided a Naddāha, a distant relative of the naiads from the Northern Kingdoms, in evading capture by fishermen. However, his most formidable challenge arose when he confronted a plague of ahemait that decimated the livestock in the Aaru region. This encounter would leave an indelible mark on him, despite its brevity.

This encounter would be none other than crossing paths with the Lady of Time and Space herself, Ciri. After her defeat of the weapon known as the [White Frost](#), Ciri had been traveling the multiverse, occasionally appearing on the Continent. She was on a mission in the region of Aaru, as she had discovered the origin of this multiversal threat, which was an echo of Xicllaniparan, a [Cosmic Horror](#). Upon learning of the existence of these beings, she decided to utilize her inherited abilities and defend the multiverse from possible destruction.

Ciri had traveled to the region due to her meeting with the Operator during her investigation of the White Frost. The Operator had some knowledge of the threat these beings posed, but unfortunately, much of the information had been lost during the fall of the Vran civilization. Therefore, he directed Ciri to Hannu, indicating that beneath this region of the Far South country layed the ruins of an ancient Vran city where she might find the information she needed.

Meanwhile, Putnam was dealing with the aforementioned ahemait plague in the region. No matter how many he killed, they kept reappearing. So, he decided to search for their source in the hopes of finally putting an end to the plague. In the depths of his investigation, Putnam discovered the ruins of the the

aforementioned ancient Vran city, where he unexpectedly encountered Ciri. Surprised to see another person in such a place, he became confused and was attacked by a alpha ahemait. However, Ciri intervened at the last minute, defending him and preventing any harm. Afterward, they formally introduced themselves and had a conversation.

Ciri, on her part, was in the midst of uncovering more information about the Cosmic Horrors. Together with Putnam, they realized that the never-ending stream of monsters was stemming from the presence of magical relics. These relics were used by the ancient Vrans of the south to channel the power of the beings, as it was rare for someone from their race to be born with an affinity for magic. The Vrans had harnessed this power for various purposes. However, they also discovered that it was this very reason that led to their downfall. They were deceived by the weakened form of the entity known as [Zsch-Kar, The Emperor](#), which ultimately resulted in their destruction. However, before their demise, the Vrans managed to partially seal Zsch-Kar and put it to sleep again.

Recently awakened, Zsch-Kar had been utilizing its weakened powers through the relics to create the ahemaits and terrorize humans. The purpose was to lure unsuspecting individuals to the city, trick them, and gradually threaten all existence once again with the help of their worship. Similar to another weakened form of a Cosmic Horror, [Dagon](#), who had been manipulating the Vodyanoi in the oceans and rivers of the world.

Putnam and Ciri realized that they needed to find and destroy these relics to put an end to the source of the monster problem. They ventured deeper into the ruins, facing various challenges and overcoming numerous obstacles. Their determination and combined skills proved to be a formidable force. Eventually, they located and destroyed the relics, thereby stopping the source of the monsters and eliminating the looming threat over Aaru.

However, during their quest, Putnam ended up badly wounded and thus remained unaware that Zsch-Kar, The Emperor, was the cause of the monsters, while Ciri had made this discovery. This revelation had a profound impact on Ciri, prompting her to keep this vital information to herself in order to protect the witcher. For an instant, she thought of asking her friends, her family, for help, but they had already done too much for her by defeating the Wild Hunt. And the weight of Vesemir's death was still on her shoulders. She understood that the situation was far from over, and that she had to do it alone, at least for a time.

Since Zsch-Kar, The Emperor, was not destroyed but merely trapped in its weakened state, posing a continuing threat to everyone. If she wanted to find a way to stop it before it fully recovered, she would have to embark on a journey to the far corners of the multiverse.

But first and foremost, Ciri knew that she had to prioritize saving Putnam's life. He had been a valuable ally and a great help to her. Without hesitation, she swiftly escorted him out of the treacherous place and brought him to a nearby oasis where she could provide better care for his wounds.

There, Ciri carefully tended to Putnam's wounds, skillfully applying bandages and ensuring his comfort. She kept a watchful eye on his condition, attuned to any signs of improvement or complications.

As they conversed, their connection deepened as they discovered shared experiences, such as their sword combat training under Coën's tutelage. Additionally, they stumbled upon a surprising and amusing connection: both of them had played a crucial role in saving Fabio Sachs' life at different points in their lives. This revelation, initially lighthearted, further strengthened the bond that was forming that night.

As the night unfolded, they took turns recounting their adventures, regaling each other with tales of perilous encounters and formidable monsters. Through these animated exchanges, they found common ground and realized that their paths had intertwined for a reason. They were more alike than they had initially assumed.

In the midst of sharing their anecdotes, they discovered shared pain and loss. Both Ciri and Putnam, in their pursuit of forging their own paths, had experienced heartache and sacrifice. They had sacrificed more than they had gained, and their shared understanding of this struggle brought them closer. The air became filled with a mixture of vulnerability and resilience as they revealed their innermost thoughts, unburdening themselves of the weight they had carried alone. In those moments of shared vulnerability, they found solace and understanding, drawing strength from their shared experiences.

And before they knew it, a mutual attraction had blossomed between them, leading to a gentle and timid kiss. It was as if both of them feared that by indulging in this act, they would condemn each other. What followed seemed like a blur, especially for Putnam, as if it were all part of a beautiful dream.

In the morning, when Putnam woke up, he felt renewed and fully recovered from

his wounds. He was surprised to find that Ciri was no longer there, and a profound sense of longing for her washed over him. He knew that despite its brevity, their encounter had left a deep mark on him. Soon after, as he returned from bathing in the oasis, he discovered that she had left him a letter. In the letter, she briefly explained that she couldn't disclose everything about the reason she had been in the country, as she couldn't risk exposing him to the dangers she faced. She expressed her gratitude for his help and the time they had spent together, but made it clear that their paths had to separate to ensure his safety.

And then, as if life had returned karma to him for the abandonments he had made through letters, at that moment, he recalled Tubiel's mistakes and then his own. Putnam began to grasp, to some extent, how all the women he had left in such a manner must have felt. Finally, he learned the valuable lesson that it was not the right way to handle things, regardless of how good one's intentions might be. He realized that if she had explained her reasons for parting ways to him that very night, he would have understood. While there would still be setbacks due to the unfolding events, fortunately, they wouldn't constitute significant steps backward in terms of his mental healing and personal growth.

The tyranny of the three brothers (late spring / early summer of 1283)

“A eagle that hunts a combative crane can only anticipate a life burdened with suffering.”

—Kai Yih

After that almost dreamlike encounter and successfully putting an end to the ahemait plague, despite the conflicting emotions within him, Putnam did not actively seek out Ciri. Instead, he quietly departed and returned to the capital of Hannu to fulfill his duty and report that, in his view, he had resolved all the country's monster-related issues. Once back, he joined Fabio and Istredd at Thot's Lair to offer assistance while the others completed their assigned tasks given by Meriamón. The completion of these tasks occurred shortly thereafter and was met with significant overall success, with one notable exception: Lukasz's inability to capture the leader of the cultists. Nonetheless, Meriamón showed forgiveness, understanding that Lukasz had brought the remaining members to face judgment, which would likely lead them to discover the whereabouts of the leader. Thus, no major complications arose.

And so, they achieved yet another success, adding Hannu to the list of distant

countries willing to trade (and even ally, in this case) with Lyria and Rivia. And finally, they set course for [Buyan](#) after such a long time. However, their fortunate streak would come to an end sooner rather than later, as the toughest part of their journey made itself known almost immediately upon their arrival in the kingdom they had longed to reach.

布延 (Bùyán) nordlinged as Buyan, also known as Bujan, Buian, Brouka or Lomon, depending on which area of Bia Thin you ask, was a mountainous kingdom located inland, which could be accessed by navigating one of its many rivers upstream. It was situated along the so-called [Route of Colors](#) (named after the trade of colorful fabrics and vibrant gemstones), a commercial route that connected the eastern parts of the Nilfgaardian Empire with remote places like [Vinland](#) in the [Far North](#). This made Buyan a country greatly benefited by trade, an ideal country to establish a trade treaty with Lyria and Rivia, even more so than the others they had already established treaties with. While those treaties were positive, they would not have been as significant as this one, as it would have allowed the Route of Colors to reach the Northern Realms more directly. However, the circumstances in which they found the kingdom, unfortunately, ended up preventing this from happening.

The history of Buyan is long and complicated, but to summarize, the territory, like Valkare, had once been part of the Great Zerrikania through the marriage of one of its princes to the queen of Zerrikania. However, it eventually gained independence. By the time the expedition arrived, centuries had passed since then. Nevertheless, Zerrikania and Buyan maintained a strong relationship, and both cultures shared common traits due to the time when they were one united country. One of these shared traits was none other than their worship of dragons. In fact, the people of Buyan, up until that time, had been ruled by a dynasty of kings known as "*Driūg gyalpo*" or "Dragon Kings." It was said that they were descendants of a bronze dragon, specifically the bronze dragon who became the first king of Buyan and under his leadership, he unified the warring human tribes, after centuries of conflict, finally brought peace to that land.

But everything must come to an end, and by the time Fabio and the rest of the expedition had arrived in that territory, it was also the case for the Dragon Kings dynasty. Just a few years prior, the dynasty had fallen due to a popular uprising sparked by a dire economic situation caused by a period of terrible harvests and a steep increase in taxes, along with foreign intervention of certain countries from the region of Melukka. This led to the army rising up and, before long,

seizing power, exiling the surviving members of the royal family. The new government that emerged was the Dreki Triumvirate, composed of the three brothers who had led the uprising: Chalik Dreki, Norbu Dreki, and Tandin Dreki (or at least, that's how they would be known to the Nordlings based on the works published by Fabio Sachs).

Their government, as one would expect, was harsh, marked by discipline and severity. Fueled by the fear of losing their country forever to foreign intervention, they became increasingly closed off, almost striving for autarky. Their xenophobia reached levels that would even frighten the most ignorant and brute Nordling. Consequently, upon the expeditionary group's initial contact with the people of Buyan, they were immediately attacked, subdued, captured, and brought before the country's justice system for judgment, solely based on their foreign origins and their intention to establish a trade treaty. Driven by paranoia, the Buyanese believed that such a treaty would subject them to the domination of another country, an outcome they were unwilling to accept after enduring numerous hardships.

After that, the expedition spent several days imprisoned, ironically saving themselves from execution thanks to two terrible things: bureaucracy and piracy. Due to bureaucracy, it took several days to prepare the execution, which allowed them to survive long enough for pirate Kai Yih and her crew to attack the city of Bhoatanta where they were held. They were "rescued" by her, although their fate was not much better. Kai Yih took them as slaves with the intention of either incorporating them into her crew or selling them due to their exoticism in those lands.

Interestingly, Kai Yih subtly and indirectly became the inspiration for the animal that Putnam would adopt for his school, the crane, due to a large tattoo of a black crane on her back, which concealed the marks of her dark past. She also played a part in the "origin" of one of Putnam's adopted children and early members of the school, Halsey Bo Pitch, better known as Halsey "The Basan". Since Kai Yih's brother, a renegade sorcerer who had joined her crew, would be Halsey's biological father.

Kai Yih was an intriguing woman in every sense. In terms of her physical appearance, she stood out with freckles adorning her face, a result of sun exposure and her skin type. Her slanted pink eyes and dark green hair, both eyebrows and head hair, added to her unique look, making her distinct even in

that region of the Continent. These characteristics indirectly hinted at her quadroon heritage.

She was a tall woman, though not as tall as Putnam, but still considered tall by Tuyotukian and Biathinian standards. She possessed an elegant yet commanding demeanor and figure, even though her physique, at first glance, might not have matched that of her male counterparts. While they exhibited brute strength, she showcased agility and swiftness. However, when it came to asserting her authority, she did so not through fear but through earning respect. Her men regarded her as the sole deserving and capable leader among them.

Her story is complex and intricate, so let's summarize it briefly before moving on. Hailing from the Kingdom of Lichavis, Kai Yih had humble origins. At a very young age, her parents sold her as a child prostitute, and through a series of events, she ended up in the Tuyotuki Islands, where she served for a period of time. When she was around 16 years old, during the attack on the city of Yominokuni on Takami Island, she was captured along with her fellow prostitutes by a Zerrikanian pirate known as Hagana Javed (or Hagalér Javed in the original Zerrikanian dialect). Hagana eventually freed the girls and provided them with a better life, but he developed a strong infatuation with Kai and raised her as his own daughter, considering her his second daughter after already having one of his own. After Hagana's death in the 1270s due to factors like old age and gout, he passed on his ship and crew to Kai. Shortly thereafter, she would reunite with her biological brother.

After taking them as slaves, Kai assessed them physically and interrogated them to gauge their potential, which, fortunately for the group, would lead to their path to freedom, although they couldn't see it at that moment. It was during this time that the expedition discovered Kai's linguistic abilities, as she spoke up to six languages: three Bia Thin dialects, Tuyotukian, Zerrikanian Dialect, and the Nordling Common Tongue (although the latter with a pronounced Zerrikanian accent). During the evaluations and interrogations, Putnam played the card of his charisma and gradually won her over, using his charm and the unique physical factor of his bicolor eyes (among other things, such as the fact that Putnam and Lukasz had once saved her life when Eberhatt transformed into a werewolf due to not taking his medication for a long time). Sooner rather than later, the expedition was liberated, and Kai Yih agreed to take them wherever they wanted, but in exchange for a favor. And that favor was none other than helping her overthrow the Dreki Triumvirate. If there was one thing she had

acquired from her almost adoptive father, apart from her love for the freedom that pirate life represented, it was her hatred for oppressive governments, and that regime was one of them. According to Hagana's Pirate Code, it was the duty of a pirate to overthrow oppressive governments whenever possible, to show the world the benefits of true freedom.

Kai Yih, along with her crew, had embarked on a daring endeavor of guerrilla warfare, utilizing plundering as a key strategy (in fact, it was during one such plundering operation that they took the expedition as prisoners/slaves). However, despite their efforts, their approach hadn't yielded the desired results. Recognizing the need for a different approach, Kai Yih, having developed a sense of empathy towards the captives, particularly due to Putnam's influence, decided to seek their assistance by requesting a favor.

With a clear plan in mind, Kai Yih understood that the success of her mission would depend on assembling a formidable force. She recognized the unique skills possessed by the expedition's mages, which made them valuable additions alongside the skilled witchers. The proposition was met with intense deliberation by the expedition members, but ultimately, they were convinced by Putnam's persuasive abilities and his growing bond with Kai Yih, both emotionally and otherwise.

The core of the plan revolved around summoning the pirate confederation, a gathering of like-minded eastern pirates led by Kai Yih herself on occasion. Kai Yih, renowned by various epithets such as (translated) "The Pink Monster," "The Black Crane," "The Scarlet Siren," and "The Jade Tempest" in the Far East, had established a formidable reputation as a pirate captain. Summoning the confederation would not be a daunting task, given her standing within their ranks.

With the combined strength of the pirate confederation and the assistance of the expedition, their strategy would involve launching coordinated attacks on the various cities of Buyan, many of which were situated near rivers. By capturing these cities, they aimed to weaken the grip of the triumvirate government and incite rebellion among the populace. The act of plundering these cities would further fuel discontent, leading to potential uprisings, including within the army itself, which could eventually contribute to the downfall of the triumvirate.

Putnam, however, harbored concerns about the possibility of the people falling under the rule of a worse tyrant. Yet, he also acknowledged that if the people

were left with nothing, they would have nothing to lose. This harsh reality would serve as a catalyst for the Buyanese to rise and rebuild their society, stronger and better than before.

The end of the Dreki Tyranny

After some time (less than they had anticipated, though), they succeeded in reuniting the pirate confederation once more and, most importantly, organizing themselves without being discovered by the then government of Buyan. The fleet was immense, comprising approximately 30 ships, including Kai Yih's own, and boasting around 10,000 men. The rivers in that region of Bia Thin were colossal, even larger than the Pontar in the Northern Realms. It was thanks to this that they never found themselves overcrowded at any point, allowing them to navigate freely.

After several meetings, the aforementioned plan was put into action. For the members of the expedition, the environment was somewhat uncomfortable since they were not accustomed to the pirate life. However, they quickly managed to adapt, with Putnam and surprisingly Istredd being the ones who adapted the best. The pirate confederation consisted of members from all parts of the Far East, primarily Bia Thin and Tuyotukian pirates, followed by some Zerrikanians, and to a lesser extent, Melukkans.

In fact, during that time, Putnam and Lukasz were recognized as witchers, and as a gift, they were given two sets of armor from the extinct [School of the Lungonite](#), which was unknown to them. This later led Istredd, around the 1290s, to publish an essay with indirect help from Putnam, who had encountered some exotic schools, two of them being extinct—the Spider and the Scorpion—and the [School of the Lion](#), which was still active. The essay focused on the migrations of witchers and how, following the dissolution of the Order of Witchers, the guild could have expanded across the Continent with numerous schools beyond the Northern Realms, Nilfgaard, and even Zerrikania.

The attacks, meticulously planned and executed under Kai Yih's strategic command, aimed to strike a balance between achieving their objectives and minimizing harm to innocent civilians. While the pirate raids were undeniably brutal, Kai Yih's strict orders ensured that the focus remained on neutralizing the military forces rather than causing unnecessary harm to non-combatants.

The primary objective of the attacks was to cripple the military apparatus of the ruling triumvirate. By systematically dismantling their armed forces, Kai Yih

sought to expose the vulnerability and ineptitude of the government in safeguarding its people. The pirates aimed to create a power vacuum that would compel the population to rise up against their tyrannical rulers, driven by their frustration and disillusionment with their supposed protectors.

Kai Yih understood that if the attacks were perceived as a direct assault on the civilian population, it would inadvertently rally the people together in defense of their homeland, potentially reinforcing the grip of the triumvirate government. Instead, she strategically focused on targeting military installations, supply lines, and strongholds, inflicting substantial damage and sowing doubt among the populace about the government's ability to ensure their safety.

The calculated approach taken by Kai Yih and her crew showcased their keen understanding of the political landscape. They aimed to exploit the discontent simmering beneath the surface, leveraging the people's disillusionment to their advantage. By presenting the ruling triumvirate as incapable of protecting their subjects from the relentless pirate onslaught, they hoped to ignite a spark of rebellion that would ultimately lead to the downfall of the oppressive regime. Which, eventually ended up happening and causing a new dynasty of Dragon Kings to rise in Buyan.

During this period and throughout the relentless attacks, the relationship between Putnam and Kai Yih underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a casual friends-with-benefits arrangement to a genuine couple. As their connection deepened, they discovered a profound emotional bond that went beyond their initial physical attraction. The shared experiences and challenges they faced together during the attacks solidified their relationship, creating a strong foundation for their growing love.

Once the attacks came to a close, Kai Yih remained true to her word and fulfilled her promise to the expedition. She led them to their next destination, which happened to be the illustrious city of Zerzura. Some members of the expedition viewed this development as a setback, as it meant returning to the Barsa region once again. Putnam, influenced by what he had heard in Haakland about the city and its slaves, was among those who disagreed with the decision. However, a vote was held, and the majority voted in favor of going to Zerzura. Putnam had to resign himself to the outcome. The only thing that motivated him was the possibility of finding D'yaeb'l and giving her the sword, or, more likely, finding her remains and giving her a dignified funeral. However, others saw it as a reasonable choice, since they were going with the intention, not only to explore,

but to benefit the kingdom of Lyria and Rivia with trade treaties, considering that Zerzura, the last independent stronghold of the former Southern Kingdoms, was renowned for its prosperity in the East.

Unfortunately, the love between Kai Yih and Putnam was not destined to endure. As they neared the city of Zerzura, they made the difficult decision to end their romantic relationship and remain friends. The stark contrast in their lifestyles and obligations proved insurmountable, leaving them with no choice but to part ways. Deep down, they both understood that this outcome was inevitable from the beginning, yet they chose to embrace their connection, however fleeting it may have been.

For Putnam, it marked the second breakup where he acted with emotional responsibility. Though it brought him pain, he recognized it as a significant milestone in his journey of healing from past traumas. The experience taught him valuable lessons about acceptance and personal growth. Amidst the heartbreak, he found solace in knowing that he was evolving and finding the strength to move forward.

As a poignant farewell gesture, Kai Yih presented Putnam with her cherished Zerrikanian Repeating Crossbow, a symbol of their time together and the pragmatic philosophy she embodied. It served as a reminder of the lessons he had learned and the bond they had shared.

Zerzura, The White City (Summer of 1283)

“In the heart of the Barsa desert lies Zerzura, a city veiled in mystique, where ancient secrets whisper through the wind-blown dunes.”

—Markus Hohlenberg - Tales from Nilfgaardian Empire

Zerzura, the White Pearl of Barsa, that is how the expedition had come to know it during their time in the region (although Putnam had learned about it through mentions and the events surrounding D'yaeb'l during his time in Haakland). It was a city-state of contrasts, renowned for its fame and infamy, a repository of knowledge that had long been considered lost, while also serving as a wretched place for slaves, depending on whom you asked across the Continent. While it initially seemed like an intriguing target, Hannu held a stronger allure for them. Yet, in a curious turn of events, they ultimately found themselves gravitating towards Zerzura, as if destiny was beckoning them to follow that path.

The city-state had been the sole survivor of what was formerly known as the

Southern Kingdoms before they unified and became the region of Barsa. It was considered a separate territory on most maps, as after centuries of existence and various attempts by the Barsamen, both from the east and the west, to annex it, it had managed to withstand as an independent enclave.

Isolated from the rest of the world, the city was solely linked to other civilized locations by stone roads that emanated from its various gates. Zerzura was nestled within a region of Barsa renowned as the Great Oasis, where a vast lake, resembling an inland sea, sprawled. This body of water, known as the Red Sea due to its elevated copper concentration, cast a reddish hue, necessitating the Zerzureans to filter it before utilizing it for their needs.

Due to its geographical location, once the navigable rivers ended, they had to travel on mounts or on foot through the desert, following one of the stone roads they found. It took only a few days, and although the heat was somewhat unbearable, that was the only inconvenience they faced. Besides of Putnam feeling a bit down due to his breakup with Kai Yih, causing him to be slightly more distracted in defending them from possible monsters. Fortunately, Lukasz was there to cover their backs if needed.

The city and its surrounding area left them awestruck, despite having witnessed much during the expedition. The striking contrast of the pure white city against the backdrop of the nearby oasis made it appear as an absolute paradise after days of traversing the desert. Its architecture was nothing short of breathtaking, rivaling even that of the elves. However, their enchantment would soon give way to a harsh reality as they faced a situation reminiscent of what occurred in Buyan, but this time without the intervention of the pirate. For Putnam, the impact was especially profound on an emotional level, as the white city would unearth fragments of his past that he never imagined encountering.

The reception they received, although initially tense as was customary in the white pearl of Barsa to foreigners, turned out to be quite warm, resembling the welcome extended to wealthy traders, despite having nothing to trade. This surprised them, possibly due to the prejudices some members of the expedition held about Zerzura, but they accepted it nevertheless, interpreting it as a sign that their visit to the city would be successful. And to some extent, that proved to be true.

The people treated everyone well, except for Lukasz and Putnam due to their

mutant nature. As for Putnam, the locals couldn't help but feel curious about his heterochromatic eyes, which evoked a mixture of fear and fascination. The reason behind this was that his eyes reminded them of their current queen, Nelea Sova. It turned out that Nelea was Putnam's biological mother, the same woman who had abandoned him as a baby to ensure he had a dignified death and wouldn't suffer under Aamad's experiments. It was through this act that she indirectly set him on the path to becoming a witcher. As a result, whispers and rumors about the "foreigner" spread rapidly, increasing the interest in the expedition. In less than a week since their arrival in the city, they were summoned to the Royal Court. Nelea, naturally, was intrigued to find out if there was any remote possibility that Putnam was one of the two children she had been compelled to abandon. Something that, although it might have seemed positive at first, it was not the case.

The Zerzureans physically shared certain features with what an outsider would consider the standard Melukkan, but more beautiful. This was the result of a mix between Proto-Nilgaardians (meaning half-elves of Aen Nílfe) and the early Barsamen. It was not uncommon to see a lot of people with hair and eye colors typical of this elves among them. As for the language, the Zerzureans, like the Zerrikanians, spoke a dialect of Elder Speech that was relatively more intelligible with the Elder Speech than the Zerrikanian dialect. Istredd was able to serve as a translator for the expedition during their time in the city without much difficulty, and in fact, he started working on a dictionary. However, this dictionary would be lost due to what would happen later on. To make a comparison, the difficulty between the Zerzurean Dialect and Elder Speech was a little higher than that of a speaker of Elder Speech understanding the Ellylon of the Aen Elle.

When they were called to the Royal Court, albeit due to the curiosity aroused by Putnam's eyes, the expedition was thrilled, believing they could replicate the success they had in Hannu, but at an even quicker pace. It was a collective thought, somewhat naive, but they couldn't help but feel it, considering the circumstances that surrounded them.

After abandoning her two children, Nelea dedicated herself to traveling across the Continent, trying to elude Aamad until enough years had passed and the sorcerer grew tired of pursuing her. During her travels, similar to her son before Tubiel's death (disregarding his role as a witcher), she devoted herself to helping people to the best of her ability. Eventually, she arrived in that city where she would overthrow the tyrannical queen who ruled over it, thereby liberating the

people of Zerzura. They quickly organized a vote and elected her as their new queen since the city-state operated as an elective monarchy.

Nelea's reign, at least during the first decade, was good and prosperous. However, it soon began to decline as she fell into the same vices as her predecessor, becoming tyrannical and oppressive. The fact that she was a sorceress made it difficult for anyone to oppose her. This decline was a result of the rapid deterioration of her mental health, caused by the very thing that granted her Source abilities: Manisa's Genesis. This gene endowed its carriers with characteristic blue and green heterochromatic eyes, along with an affinity for magic and other notable traits such as the absence of body hair in both sexes, lack of menstruation (while maintaining fertility) in women, a strengthened immune system, a slender and athletic appearance, and a youthful look that lasted longer than usual. Additionally, it extended their lifespan beyond that of an average human, reaching up to 150 years.

However, this gene was actually of artificial origin, a crude joke and a poor imitation by humans, specifically those from Ofir, who sought to replicate the abilities of the Aen Saevherne, particularly the Aen Saevherne among the Aen Nílfe, who were capable of creating powerful things like the Navigator Gene or the renowned Hen Ichaer. The gene's instability led to occasional and random manifestations of mental illnesses among its carriers, including schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, Capgras syndrome, and others.

Remarkably, Putnam was spared from developing schizophrenia due to the mutations he acquired as a witcher from the School of the Griffin. If he had belonged to the School of the Cat, it is likely that the illness would have been exacerbated or even manifested earlier.

The meeting with the queen was, therefore, both strange (mainly for Putnam, meeting his biological mother after so long), emotional (because Nelea, despite everything, recognized Putnam, first suspecting it from his eyes, and then confirming it thanks to a shared birthmark on their shoulders), and initially positive (as Nelea treated the expedition in the best possible way, convincing them that the monarch would be very willing to listen to their offers and collaborate with them). Also, upon learning that they were all quite friends between them, she treated them as if they were part of her family, with some emphasis on Fabio and Istredd due to their closeness to Putnam, it must be said.

Despite lacking the strong physical resemblance that had been seen between

Putnam and Nibras, Nelea and Putnam still exhibited discernible physical traits that hinted at their blood connection as mother and son. In addition to their heterochromatic eyes and the shared birthmark on their shoulders, their lips and the shape of their cheeks further contributed to the evidence of their genetic heritage.

Nelea and Putnam possessed lips that bore a striking resemblance, with a similar shape and contour. Their lips, adorned with a subtle curve, bestowed an enchanting charm to their smiles. Though their smiles may have conveyed different stories, the underlying resemblance was undeniable, serving as a testament to their shared lineage. Furthermore, the form of their cheeks exhibited a similarity, further highlighting their familial connection. There was a subtle symmetry and structure to their cheekbones, which subtly mirrored one another, reinforcing the notion of their shared genetic traits.

While physical traits can be powerful indicators of familial ties, it is important to note that their connection extended far beyond mere appearances. The bond between Nelea and Putnam transcended the realm of physical characteristics, delving into shared mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. It was in the way they laughed, their shared gestures, and the subtle nuances of their behavior that their familial connection truly came alive.

After the reunion, they were offered to stay at the palace and explore more of the city, its people, and its customs, thus spending a few wonderful days, even for Putnam, who had become more cautious but allowed himself to be carried away by the overall sentiment of the expedition, especially by the fact that he had his mother back in his life. His only concern at that time was D'yaebel, finding out whether she was still alive or not. However, he didn't know how to approach the topic with the queen, fearing that discussing the issue of slavery might offend her and lead to a disastrous situation. Having developed a certain bond with his mother during that time, he was afraid of jeopardizing it.

Ultimately, he attempted to inquire about D'yaebel, but his efforts only yielded vague or nonsensical answers. The only glimmer of hope he received, albeit faint, was overhearing some guards discussing a dangerous woman who had attempted to assassinate the overseer responsible for the slaves in the city's farming areas.

Nelea for her part, barely separated from the witcher, Putnam learned a lot about his origins, more than she already knew from her stay in Ofir. Nelea also

consented to him, as if trying to make up for the time she was not with him. Putnam, although a bit overwhelmed, accepted it without problems. Because he noticed that there was something wrong with the woman, he noticed her to be broken and tired, but covering her appearances (in that sense like him) and the witcher, regarding to perceive that state, was not usually wrong. And such was the case, because Nelea suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, and she was only having a period in which the symptoms had diminished a little. It would be because of this, in fact, that the expedition would suffer the hardest part of their journey. Since once the "grace period" were over for Nelea, and the symptoms returned with force, the paranoid schizophrenia got the better of her, and made her enslave Putnam and the expedition, after she alleged that they had tried to poison her to her guards.

Ironically, if any good were to come from his time as a slave, it would be the opportunity to finally reunite with D'yaeb'l and be by her side once again.

Concerning the rest of the expedition, before their enslavement, Nelea willingly accepted everything she was told and signed a trade agreement (though regrettably, it would never come to fruition). Soon after, driven by impulsiveness, she ordered the construction of a new stone road to the most nearby city in Barsa, envisioning a smoother flow of future trade with Lyria and Rivia. However, the road after the enslavement of the expedition, remained unfinished and eventually succumbed to the relentless desert.

The days as a slave were arduous, not primarily due to the work itself, which involved mining in a nearby quarry and toiling in the fields, but rather because of the treatment and punishments endured as a result of numerous escape attempts he tried.

The Slaves Revenge

During the first days as a slave, Putnam did not encounter D'yaeb'l. This was mainly because they were assigned to different work sites. However, he heard numerous rumors about her. While her name was not explicitly mentioned, Putnam could deduce from the behaviors that it must be the witcheress. The rumors varied but could be broadly categorized into two groups. There were rumors about her dangerous nature, and shortly after, rumors emerged of her rebellion against the slave masters. According to these rumors, she led a small group of slaves, instigated an uprising, and managed to escape, leaving several soldiers dead in her path. Some claimed she had disappeared into the depths of

the oasis, while others believed she sought refuge in the abandoned areas of the city. How she accomplished all of this, considering the formidable nature of the Zerzura nsoldiers who were known to be a match even for a witcher, remained a mystery. However, the Irbis of Hengfors possessed the ingenuity and cunning necessary to overcome such obstacles.

However, it wouldn't be long before Putnam could find out for himself. Unexpectedly, his path crossed with D'yaeb'l's once again when she organized an attack with the (former) slaves under her command on the quarry where he was working. They overwhelmed the soldiers, captured the slave workers, and brought them to her hideout deep inside the oasis. D'yaeb'l's intention was to recruit them to her cause before granting them freedom. She had a plan to overthrow the monarchy of Zerzura and bring an end to the city-state's slavery once and for all.

The group of slaves, by the way, was diverse, primarily composed of non-humans (many of whom were of dyrians ancestry) and a few foreigners (among them, the members of the expedition). Although it may have appeared inconsequential, this diversity would prove to be advantageous in the near future.

Physically, D'yaeb'l hadn't changed much. She had shorter hair, acquired some new scars (including a few on her face), and appeared thinner. Her body was also adorned with freckles from the sun.

The reencounter between D'yaeb'l and Putnam (which would be the last, both for the good and for the bad, for what would happen later) was tense at first, as D'yaeb'l had held a grudge for not having saved her from her fate as a slave in Haakland and having ended up there, with which she was about to try to kill him again as soon as they crossed glances and a few words. Luckily, Fabio (who had been informed of Putnam and D'yaeb'l's meeting in Haakland by Putnam himself after leaving that country) intervened just in time on seeing the situation, revealing to D'yaeb'l that Putnam had not only killed Brehen (something that was quickly corroborated by the rest of the expedition) but also recovered the sword (thus saving the witcher's life and to a certain extent, making amends with him for the events of 1281), making the initial tension of the reunion turn into something emotional that ended with a passionate kiss between Putnam and D'yaeb'l. As if the Irbis, without words, thanked him for having put an end to one of the sources of her suffering, and for having recovered that object that was so valuable to her, so that finally, after decades of suffering, she could not stop

herself on her way to healing and peace of mind (because the advances arising from the bond between them, although important, were not enough).

And although their bond would grow and strengthen after that, they would need time for it, as they were obviously not in the best situation and had to resolve their current predicament first. For the record, unlike Putnam, D'yaeb'l did not plan the fall of Zerzura as an act of justice or empathy towards the remaining slaves; rather, it was driven by revenge and a desire to plunder its riches. Yes, she had changed, and yes, she had regained some of the humanity she had lost, paving the way for a stable future between the two of them. But, at least in that moment, she was still the same D'yaeb'l that Putnam knew. The wall that constituted a big part of her being was broken, but not destroyed, to put it poetically.

The first phase of the fall of Zerzura consisted of recovering their belongings (as what they had obtained from the dead soldiers was not enough), acquiring supplies (as they could barely sustain themselves with what they hunted and gathered from the oasis), and further training the exslaves they had while also liberating more.

To accomplish this, they divided into three groups. Lukasz, Fabio, and the Mardu would be responsible for training the slaves in combat. Putnam and D'yaeb'l would pose as soldiers to infiltrate their ranks, retrieve their confiscated belongings, and procure supplies. Meanwhile, the mages would serve as a distraction, causing chaos in the city to ensure that only a minimal number of soldiers were positioned in the so-called "White Fortress" (essentially the magic academy/headquarters of Zerzura's soldiers). Additionally, a part of the former slaves whom D'yaeb'l had briefly trained would venture to the areas where slaves were still held, taking advantage of the chaos created by the sorcerers to set them free.

Everyone agreed with the plan, as there was little else they could do in their situation. So, after securing everything, they swiftly put it into motion, resulting in a partial success. D'yaeb'l finally, once and for all, recovered the sword and acquired valuable items like a city map. However, two out of the four mages of the expedition, Stucco and Zavist, fell in combat during the distraction. Additionally, Putnam had not managed to retrieve Tubiel's medallion, which Nelea kept in her possession because she found it beautiful. Furthermore, the former slaves sent to liberate those remaining succeeded in freeing some, although not all of them. To compound matters, the chaos caused the city's

soldiers to increase their patrols around the oasis, posing a threat to their position. Since the soldiers originally believed that the escaped slaves had perished in the desert after their escape, unaware that they had taken refuge in the Great Oasis, something that they had used in their advantage to make this phase of the big plan of the fall of Zerzura.

So, once the first phase was completed, they proceeded to hide themselves better, both due to increased patrols and the valuable items they had obtained, and began the second phase, which would involve a direct attack on the city with a larger scale of looting.

This part took them more time. Firstly, they needed to lower the Zerzureans' sense of alertness and catch them off guard. Secondly, they had to thoroughly plan the looting/attack. And thirdly, they had to train the newly liberated slaves for this purpose.

Only after ensuring that every slave had become a competent soldier, despite all the challenges, did they commence the operation. The advantage of having non-human liberated slaves in the group, especially many with dyrian ancestry, it was that many of them possessed distinct animalistic characteristics. This would prove advantageous during the looting.

During the time leading up to the attack, the bond between Putnam and D'yaeb'l began its transformation into what it would become in Vineta and later the Tuyotuki Islands. Furthermore, they seized the opportunity to eliminate patrols that occasionally roamed the oasis, as it provided them with a means to acquire proper equipment for the "army" they were assembling. This action also had a positive impact as it instilled fear among the Zerzureans and gave rise to false rumors of a desert monster infiltrating the Great Oasis.

And finally, after a long time, the attack and looting commenced. The Zerzureans, living in such an isolated city, used to keep the city gates open but guarded. However, due to the rumors of an invincible "desert monster" infiltrating the Great Oasis and killing soldier patrols, they had started closing the gates at night. Therefore, they launched the attack at dusk, the perfect moment for it. The gates would still be guarded, and the cover of darkness would be in their favor. They divided into four groups, each consisting of an equal number of members. One group was assigned to each gate. The teams at the northern and southern gates focused primarily on looting and, if possible, eliminating the city-state's

monarchy. Meanwhile, the teams at the western and eastern gates aimed to eliminate soldiers, liberate any remaining slaves, and provide medical assistance if needed, as it was rumored that the Zerzureans had excessively exploited the remaining slaves due to the drastic reduction in their numbers. The group at the north gate was led by D'yaebel, the one at the south gate by Putnam. Fabio led the group at the east gate, and finally, Lukasz commanded the group at the west gate.

To Putnam, the idea of having to eliminate his own mother, regardless of the many wrongs she had committed, was deeply unsettling. Without disclosing his plan to anyone, he contemplated the possibility of engaging in a conversation with her instead of resorting to violence. He sensed that something was amiss, that her actions were not entirely of her own volition. Putnam believed that he could somehow assist her, and by doing so, also aid the city of Zerzura and its inhabitants. His intention was to persuade her to voluntarily abdicate her position as queen. He was certain that the revenge represented by the attack and looting carried out by the former slaves, including himself, would make her realize the extent of the harm she had caused and the inherent cruelty of slavery. He hoped that she would relinquish her current position and join the expedition. Although the city would be left in ruins, he firmly believed that sooner or later, a new king or queen would emerge to rebuild it and usher in a new era of prosperity, one that did not exploit individuals, whether they were foreign humans or non-human beings, as mere objects. Like so many other times, he was wrong. Since Nelea, like Brehen, was beyond salvation, if his mother taught him anything before she died, it would be the importance of always striving to think objectively and setting personal feelings aside. It was a challenging task, but not an impossible one.

The attack and looting proved successful for the other groups as they acquired newfound wealth, freed the remaining slaves, and served as a long-awaited form of justice for the centuries of enslavement imposed by the Zerzureans. Undoubtedly, there were civilian and former slave casualties, for perfection cannot always be attained. However, in Putnam's case, success did not solely hinge on minimizing losses or amassing plunder, both of which he accomplished adeptly. His true challenge lay in accomplishing his other objective: the overthrow of Zerzura's monarchy.

As you can imagine, he found himself compelled to take the life of his own mother. Initially, as intended, he attempted negotiation while simultaneously

seeking to reclaim the Tubiel cat medallion in her possession after realizing that she was its current holder. However, it was precisely this pursuit, due to the significance the medallion held for him, that forced him to confront her directly. The negotiation for her abdication swiftly deteriorated into a heated dispute over the medallion, ultimately leading to a fateful duel between mother and son.

It was an intense duel, somewhat reminiscent of Vargos' confrontation with Putnam's brother three years earlier. Spells from Nelea clashed with the Witcher's signs, while Putnam's steel saber countered his mother's staff. Putnam persisted in trying to reason with her, but his efforts proved futile. It seemed as though fate was playing a cruel joke on him, bringing her back only to snatch her away once more. Consequently, Putnam held back, and Nelea nearly succeeded in killing him, leaving him severely wounded before the tides turned. Only in the final moments, while desperately defending himself, did he unintentionally deliver the fatal blow, piercing her throat with his saber.

What followed was painful, a mixture of the grief he had experienced after Tubiel's death and the anguish of having to take the life of the woman who gave him birth. It was true that he had barely known her, and Matlena had been more of a mother to him in terms of upbringing, but the pain still cut deep. They had formed a bond, one he had hoped to delve into further despite the circumstances. And yet, life had cruelly snatched her away right before his eyes. The shock of the situation left him almost oblivious to the Royal Palace being engulfed in flames. He came dangerously close to perishing there, holding his mother in his arms, if not for D'yaebel. Who, filled with concern, she had gone in search of him and ultimately saved him from that horrific fate.

The kingdom of Ketu Rahu (September 20 - November 20, 1283)

“Talking to the slaves we liberated in Zerzura, I realized that they too are familiar with the rare and intriguing Dyrians. Some of them even mentioned that they have at least one ancestor from this race, who originated from a distant kingdom known as Ketu Rahu, where they lived and thrived. Perhaps it is because of this that we rarely see them in the North anymore.”

—Fabio Sachs, Unpublished notes of the 1282 Expedition (Vol.1)

After the fall of Zerzura and inquiring about the mysterious Okami Islands, the expedition, following the recommendations of the liberated slaves before the two groups separated, set course for the country of Ketu Rahu. They retraced their steps and returning to the region of Bia Thin, finally learning its name. In

the future, Fabio would convey this knowledge to the Nordlings through his works. At that moment, Putnam and D'yaeb'l were on the verge of parting ways. Since D'yaeb'l had a desire to return to the North, but the bond she had formed with Putnam and how it had evolved compelled her to stay with him and join the expedition, despite Fabio's complaints.

Unfortunately, they were unable to transport any of the ships from the so-called Red Sea. As a result, their journey back to Bia Thin to reach Ketu Rahu took a considerable amount of time. To be more precise, the entire summer passed before they finally arrived in the capital, which also shared its name with the kingdom. It was also during this period that they also made the decision to set sail for the [Tuyotuki Islands](#). The curiosity to uncover more about these islands had been ignited by Kai Yih's subtle allusions and the intriguing tales recounted by some of the liberated slaves. Also during the journey to Ketu Rahu, Putnam's swords suffered irreparable damage, leaving them completely useless. This unfortunate outcome was partly a consequence of the intense duel he had engaged in with Nelea. The duel had already compromised the condition of his swords, and subsequent encounters with bandits and other threats inflicted additional harm, rendering them beyond repair.

As they reached Vineta, the expedition explored the capital city and its surroundings, discovering why the freed slaves had spoken so highly of the country and recommended it. The people of the kingdom proved to be welcoming and hospitable, and the kingdom itself was peaceful and prosperous. After the hardships they had faced in Buyan and the White City, the expedition was grateful for the opportunity to rest, recover, replenish their supplies, and acquire a ship and an experienced guide who could take them to the Tuyotuki Islands. They accomplished this by selling some of the valuables they had salvaged from the fall of Zerzura. Despite the language barrier, as most of them did not speak the Dyrian dialect, the expedition was well taken care of, thanks to Istredd, who was familiar with a more primitive version of the language from his archaeological work.

Putnam, for example, acquired the White Tiger of the West Armor, which he would wear until his arrival on the Tuyotuki Islands, as well as the Nine-Tailed Vixen Steel and Silver Swords set. He also had his [Zerrikanian Repeating Crossbow](#) repaired, which had also been damaged in Zerzura, although to a lesser extent. However, the Ketunian blacksmiths lacked the knowledge to repair his Scorpion Steel Saber and Griffin Silver Sword. As a result, Putnam had to rely

on the new sword set, which was given to him as a gift after being recognized as a witcher, despite not belonging to any of the schools known to the local blacksmiths (this would support what Istredd would theorize in his essay on the Witcher migrations). These swords also would be used by Putnam during his time on the Tuyotuki Islands.

During their stay in Ketu Rahu, the expedition had to carefully consider the weather conditions before embarking on their journey to the Tuyotuki Islands. The monsoon season was coming to an end, but the lingering heavy rains and strong winds still posed a threat at sea. They deemed it unsafe to set sail during the post-monsoon period, which, although relatively safe on land, presented dangers on the open water. Therefore, they made the decision to wait for more favorable weather, spending approximately two months in the kingdom. During this time, they focused on recuperating and preparing for the challenges that lay ahead. They also took advantage of the opportunity to engage with the people of Ketu Rahu, immersing themselves in the local culture and customs. This experience had a profound impact on Fabio, who dedicated himself to meticulous revisions of the notes he had taken. These revised notes would later be published posthumously by his son in various books recounting the expedition.

During their prolonged stay in Ketu Rahu, the relationship between Putnam and D'yaeb'l began to flourish and solidify, albeit to a limited extent. The true depth and significance of their bond, however, would only become fully apparent during their time in the Tuyotuki Islands. The extended period of time they spent together in Vineta allowed them to gradually become more open and comfortable in each other's presence. As they shared their experiences, fears, and aspirations, their connection evolved into a more formal and stable relationship.

Furthermore, the bonds of friendship also grew stronger between Putnam and Istredd during their stay in Ketu Rahu. What initially started as a cordial respect between the witcher and the mage transformed into a profound and genuine friendship. The ample time they spent together in Ketu Rahu fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation for one another.

While the camaraderie between Putnam and Istredd may not have reached the same level of intimacy as that between Putnam and Fabio, it was a significant shift in their relationship. Both Putnam and Istredd were able to transcend their past differences and prejudices. Putnam, who had harbored deep-rooted biases

against mages due to his upbringing in Kaer Seren, among other experiences like for example Herna, gradually let go of his preconceptions. The traumatic loss of Tubiel had further solidified these prejudices, but his time in Ketu Rahu allowed him to challenge and eventually release them.

Similarly, Istredd chose to put aside any lingering grudges he may have held against witchers. Despite his previous encounters with Geralt, which had left a mark on his perception of witchers, Istredd recognized the opportunity for growth and understanding. In Ketu Rahu, he embraced the chance to form a genuine connection with Putnam, setting aside past animosities and embracing a more open-minded perspective.

During the expedition's stay in Ketu Rahu, Putnam took advantage of the opportunity to engage in witcher contracts. Occasionally, he was accompanied by either D'yaeb'l or Lukasz, but most often it was D'yaeb'l who joined him. These contracts provided an avenue for Putnam to test and refine his skills with the new, lighter swords he now wielded. By accepting these contracts, Putnam also expressed his gratitude to the people of Ketu Rahu for their hospitality and generosity towards the expedition. He frequently chose either not to charge them or to significantly reduce his fees, much to D'yaeb'l's amusement, who playfully teased him about his "heroic attitude" whenever he did so.

Through these contracts, Putnam encountered various local monsters. One notable encounter involved an ottasaunk, a specter known for its strong attachments to objects or places. Another contract involved a brupamor, a distant relative of the kikimores, which had abducted a priestess of [Wijun](#). Putnam also faced a magan, a crocodile-like creature with a prehensile snout and a highly armored back but a vulnerable underbelly, among other monsters. These experiences enabled Putnam to acquire valuable knowledge and skills that would prove advantageous during their time on the Tuyotuki Islands.

Tuyotuki Islands (December, 1283 - December, 1284)

After the waters of the post-monsoon period had calmed, the expedition embarked on their journey towards the Tuyotuki Islands. They sailed into what Fabio Sachs dubbed the "[East Sea](#)," while the Nilfgaardians referred to it as Mare Sgàthan, which meant "mirror sea" in reference to its remarkably clear waters compared to the Great Sea. The voyage proved relatively peaceful, although they encountered sporadic attacks from eastern vodyanoi and other sea monsters. However, with the combined skills of the two witchers and the witcheress, they

effectively dispatched these threats, adapting quickly to face unfamiliar adversaries.

It was during this eventful journey that Putnam found himself in a challenging situation. Based in one of the ship's captain inventions, he decided to utilize a prototype of a "diving suit." This innovation, later employed by the witchers of the school he would establish, became a crucial asset. At a critical moment when Putnam had depleted his stock of Killer Whale potion vials, he was faced with the daunting task of confronting an umibōzu. This formidable creature threatened to destroy the ship before they could reach Tawalisi, the main island of the archipelago. Although the diving suit was rudimentary at best and lacked proper oxygen supply, it served its purpose, allowing Putnam to navigate the depths and confront the umibōzu, overcoming the challenge and ensuring their safe passage.

This experience not only highlighted Putnam's resourcefulness but also underscored the adaptability and ingenuity of witchers in facing unforeseen obstacles, becoming an integral part of the School of the Crane practices, showcasing the ongoing evolution and incorporation of new techniques and equipment.

The journey to the Tuyotuki Islands by ship lasted approximately one month, which was the standard duration for the voyage from Ketu Rahu to the main island of the archipelago. If they had chosen to travel to one of the southern islands, the journey would have likely been shortened to around two weeks. They arrived on December 20, 1283, just one day before the official start of winter, both in the Tuyotuki Islands and the Northern Kingdoms. Specifically, their destination was the port of Odaiba, a former islet that had been artificially connected to the island of Tawalisi, transforming it into a bustling port. Odaiba had emerged from the collaboration between the Nilfgaardians and the Tuyotukians shortly after their initial contacts and treaties. Over the decades, it had grown to become the main port in the archipelago known to the Nilfgaardians as the "Eastern Empire."

The port was vibrant and teeming with people from diverse backgrounds. It was not only populated by the Tuyotukians but also attracted Zerrikanians, Biathians, and, to a lesser extent, Nilfgaardians (due to the distance between the Nilfgaardian colony of [Sabana](#) and the Tuyotuki Islands) and Melukkans. Occasionally, Zangvebarian traders could be spotted as well. This diverse

presence played a crucial role in easing the cultural shock and facilitating their adaptation to the new surroundings. It also provided them with ample opportunities to seek assistance and support in this unfamiliar country.

But this promising start would soon be shattered, preventing them from carrying out many of their planned activities. Similar to their experiences in Valkare, Buyan, and Zerzura, they had arrived in Tawalisi during a tumultuous period. Tensions were high among the different clans, provinces, and even islands, which had been building up for years and eventually erupted into a civil war, which started, unfortunately, just hours after they set foot on land.

The civil war erupted just as the Emperor was visiting the port on his way to meet the Nilfgaardian ambassador. The location was suddenly besieged by unknown forces, resulting in the tragic deaths of everyone present except for the members of the expedition. As the Tuyotukian imperial authorities arrived and discovered them as the survivors, they swiftly cast blame upon expedition, quickly turning them into scapegoats for the Emperor's demise. The expected language barrier did not ease the situation; instead, it exacerbated the misunderstandings and Putnam found himself crucified once again, reliving the anguish of false accusations, though this time with less justification than in Zerrikania.

The expedition endured grueling days, subjected to the cruel crucifixion and exposed to the harsh Tuyotukian tropical weather, surpassing even Putnam's previous ordeal in Zerrikania. However, a glimmer of hope emerged when the witches of the [School of the Dragon](#) made the courageous decision to form a separate faction within the ongoing civil war and rescue them, primarily to hear their account of the events that transpired. Their allegiance, akin to their predecessor school, the School of the Manticore, lay with the royal family, specifically with the Emperor. With his demise, they decided to remain impartial, withholding their alliance with any faction or self-proclaimed emperor until the truth surrounding his death was uncovered. What was abundantly clear, though, was that the foreigners were not responsible.

The language barrier was also a problem to communicate with these witches, albeit to a lesser extent, since they not only spoke Tuyotukian, which served as the lingua franca of the islands, but also their own language that had emerged a few decades after Gilgasmesh's arrival and the founding of the school. This language was exclusively used among the witches themselves and was a creole incorporating elements of Tuyotukian, the Nordling Common Tongue, and the Zerrikan Dialect. Grammatically, it was on par with the Nordling Common

Tongue and also comprising 40% of its vocabulary, while 30% came from Tuyotukian and another 30% from the Zerrikani Dialect.

The only "alliance," so to speak, that the witches of the School of the Dragon would form, at least at that moment, was with the expedition once it had recovered, and proper communication could take place. If anything became a common ground between the two groups, it was their shared desire to uncover the truth regarding the Emperor's death. The expedition couldn't leave the islands because the ports allowing passage for foreign ships had been closed due to the conflict. In fact, the Dragon Witchers already had a plan in mind, which involved seeking out a geomancer named Hoseki, one of the few remaining Aen Hagde on the islands. They believed that her abilities would be instrumental in objectively unraveling the mystery behind the Emperor's death, bringing peace to the departed ruler, and potentially putting an end to the recently ignited civil war.

As an intriguing fact, it was the witches of the School of the Dragon who bestowed upon Putnam the nickname "Futari no tamashī" (ふたりの魂) in Tuyotukian. This unique nickname translates to "The One with Two Souls" or "The Dual-Souled," and it became synonymous with Putnam among the locals. The origin of this moniker can be traced back to the mesmerizing sight of his heterochromatic eyes, which held a captivating allure. One eye shimmered with a vibrant green hue, reminiscent of lush forests and untamed wilderness, while the other possessed a serene shade of blue, reminiscent of tranquil waters and vast horizons.

For the Dragon Witchers and later the Tuyotukian, the contrasting colors of his eyes symbolized more than just a physical peculiarity; they encapsulated the essence of his nature. Those who observed him couldn't help but sense a profound duality within him, a clash between two distinct aspects of his being. It was as if two souls resided within him, each with its own set of experiences, emotions, and perspectives. a clash between his haunting traumas and the unwavering strength of his values, a constant battle that shaped his actions and decisions.

The Tuyotukian Civil War / Investigating the murder of the Emperor

The expedition was taken to the fortress of the School of the Dragon, known as Watadzumi no haka (translated as "the tomb of Watatsumi"), where they could recover under favorable conditions, among other things. Initially, the expedition

disagreed with the plan of the Dragon Witchers, deeming it too risky and ineffective due to its reliance on a single person. However, they eventually came to accept it. The primary reason for their change of heart was their limited knowledge of this distant land, with only fleeting glimpses gained throughout their journey, as previously mentioned. It required a leap of faith, as they placed their complete trust in their saviors.

It should be noted that several members of the expedition were fascinated by these secluded and virtually unknown witchers. Although they were not at their best after the "[Draconid Uprising](#)," they were in a much better state compared to other schools. To illustrate this, one could say they were in a similar state to the School of the Wolf after the Cats' betrayal in the Witcher's Tournament. Lukasz, in particular, became captivated and would eventually join the School of the Dragon. Istredd, on the other hand, was equally fascinated, as the existence of this school further supported his hypothesis regarding the Witcher Migrations.

As for Putnam, after being able to communicate effectively with them, he got along well with everyone. In his opinion, they blended the best qualities of the Manticore and Griffin schools. He was even tempted to join their school, but ultimately dismissed the idea. His friendship and loyalty to Fabio Sachs weighed more heavily.

In addition to the primary plan of searching for Hoseki, the witchers of the School of the Dragon devised several backup plans. These plans served as alternative approaches to address the situation they found themselves in. One such plan involved actively listening to the pleas and requests of the various clans involved in the conflict. The Dragon Witchers positioned themselves as intermediaries, seeking to mediate and find common ground among the warring factions. Their goal was to facilitate communication and foster understanding in order to minimize the potential casualties of the civil war. By taking on this role, they aimed to bring about a peaceful resolution and pave the way for the selection of a new emperor who could restore stability to the islands.

However, recognizing the complexity of the situation, the Dragon Witchers also had another contingency plan in place. This plan involved a more direct and confrontational approach. They were prepared to face the leaders of the clans head-on, engaging in battles and confrontations to defeat them and uncover the truth behind the emperor's death. By interrogating the defeated leaders, they hoped to uncover the culprit responsible for the destabilization of the empire. This plan, although riskier, was seen as a necessary measure to ensure justice

and bring about a resolution to the conflict as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, despite their strategic thinking and efforts, these backup plans did not yield the desired outcomes for the Hogo-sha (Tuyotukian name for the Dragon Witchers, meaning "Guardians" as they protect the people from the yokais) and the expedition. Instead, they faced further losses and setbacks.

Assassinations, duels, and the ongoing civil war took their toll on the Dragon Witchers and their mission. The complexity of the political landscape and the deep-rooted tensions within the clans proved to be formidable challenges that could not be easily overcome.

The search for Hoseki would take time. That's why the other backup plans were put into motion. No one knew the whereabouts of the elf, as she would appear and disappear at her own will, offering her services sporadically. It was highly likely that they would have to travel from village to village, from city to city, and even from island to island, inquiring until they found her. And so it began, a journey that would span a long year, navigating through the complex situation of the civil war, and facing a multitude of dangers along the way, whether they be human or monstrous.

Tawalisi

Their time on the island of

Tawalisi proved to be disappointingly unproductive when it came to finding any concrete leads on Hoseki's whereabouts. They only encountered stories and rumors about her extraordinary abilities as a geomancer and the wise counsel she provided to the local inhabitants. However, their luck changed when they reached a village nestled in the Horai Mountain, situated in the northern part of the island.

This village became the target of an unexpected attack orchestrated by the Sanzu Clan. The expedition, along with the Dragon Witchers, found themselves compelled to defend the village and its people. It was during this intense battle that they stumbled upon a significant revelation. They learned that several clans were also in search of Hoseki, although their motivations differed significantly from the expedition and Dragon Witcher's own. Whispers and hearsay suggested that she might be hiding in the island of Tawarisi or even in Kami, located in the southern region of the empire.

These clans, driven by self-interest, hoped to purchase Hoseki and exploit her abilities to their

advantage. Their ultimate goal was to install a new emperor from their own clan, while also blaming their rival clans for the Emperor's demise, effectively eliminating them from the political landscape. The stakes were significantly raised, and the urgency to locate Hoseki grew even more pressing. The expedition, alongside the Dragon Witchers, now faced not only the daunting task of unraveling the truth behind the Emperor's death, but also finding and safeguarding Hoseki from falling into the wrong hands, and also thwarting the schemes of these various factions along the way.

By the way, it was during the defense of the Horai village that Putnam saved a newborn puppy, the lone survivor of its litter, from the flames. He adopted the puppy, naming him Frey in honor of the brother of the goddess he had begun to follow (more as a personal philosophy than a religion, it should be noted), Freyja, after Tubiel's death.

It is worth mentioning that news of the Dragon Witchers forming a separate neutral faction and their objectives spread rapidly throughout the archipelago. As a result, several clans also began searching for the almost legendary Hoseki and occasionally confronted the witchers due to their own interests.

Tawarisi

As the expedition and the Dragon Witchers embarked on their journey to the island of Tawarisi, the anticipation and curiosity grew. The island, situated to the east and approximately two days away, held a reputation as the "younger sister" of Tawalisi, sharing many similarities in its landscape and cultural heritage.

Tawarisi carried immense significance within the empire, serving as a vital granary due to its fertile lands and the generosity of its waters. It was a place of abundance and prosperity, a haven for agriculture and sustenance. The expedition members, including Putnam, D'yaebi, and their comrades, couldn't help but be captivated by the island's natural beauty and the sense of tranquility it exuded even when a civil war was happening.

Upon their arrival, it became evident why the Nilfgaardians had such a profound interest in the archipelago. Tawarisi appeared to be truly blessed by the gods, as the locals fervently believed. The land thrived, and the people lived in harmony with nature, reaping its bountiful rewards. It was a sight to behold, a testament to the island's importance and the power it held within the empire.

As the expedition delved deeper into Tawarisi's secrets, they discovered that its strategic value extended beyond its agricultural wealth. The island's

geographical location made it a crucial stronghold, a gateway to the rest of the archipelago. Its control could provide a significant advantage in securing dominance over the entire region. The Nilfgaardians' interest in Tawarisi was not solely driven by its resources but also by its strategic position in their ambitions for a possible expansion through the Far East beyond the colony of Sabana. This possible expansion, fortunately, remained nothing more than plans that were not carried out after Emhyr's death.

In Tawarisi, their progress towards their objectives was limited but fruitful. As they traveled across the island, with the foreign and local witchers fulfilling contracts to defend the local population against the dangerous and powerful monsters that were abundant there, unlike in the North. Putnam (accompanied always by D'yaebel at that time and a young Frey) faced monsters such as a kappa, an akugyo, a basan, a baku, and many others, earning the duo of the Griffin and the Snow Leopard a good reputation in the islands and in the process finally solidifying their relationship after so much time and so many clashes they had had. Ironically, thanks to having put their differences aside in the middle of the unknown.

Amidst their encounters, they managed to uncover two significant clues. One was discovered with the assistance of the locals, after having solved a problem with a ubume while the other was stumbled upon during their investigation and cleaning of a battlefield infested with tuyotukian ghouls. It was there that they came across a gravely wounded soldier who claimed to have witnessed the elf woman.

The first clue was related to the mystery of the Emperor's death and revolved around the destruction of the training center of the Onna-musha, the Emperor's personal female guard, caused by a mysterious fire. This revelation shed light on why the Emperor was left unprotected on his way to meet with the Nilfgaardian ambassador. It was likely that news of the fire had reached his ears, and believing that the port was safe enough, the Emperor sent the Onna-musha to Tawarisi to assist their sister warriors and salvage what they could from the ruins. This decision left the ruler completely defenseless.

The second clue, although just as vague as the first one regarding Hoseki's whereabouts, held great significance as it narrowed down their search. It revealed that Hoseki was not on Tawarisi, but rather hidden within the ruins of an ancient temple dedicated to the worship of dragons. These forbidden cults had been destroyed and outlawed for centuries, especially since the

establishment of Emperor worship.

Their search presented a daunting challenge as they had to meticulously explore one ruin after another in their quest to find her, even if it meant venturing into the other islands within the archipelago. Thus, they divided into groups and embarked on a thorough exploration of the diverse ruins scattered across Tawarisi. Lukasz was accompanied by Eberhatt and a group of Dragon Witchers, including Foxicura and Jubei, which further fueled Lukasz's desire to join their school. Putnam, on the other hand, went with Fabio, D'yaebel, and Herardo. Additional groups were also formed and led by Istredd and the Mardu of the expedition, respectively. However, despite their efforts, they found no sign of Hoseki. Instead, their exploration exposed them to treacherous perils in the form of menacing monsters, intricate traps, and long-buried secrets that were best left undisturbed.

Undeterred, their determination to locate Hoseki compelled them to extend their journey throughout the entire archipelago, moving from one island to another in pursuit of the elusive elf and the truth she could reveal regarding the death of the Emperor.

Consolidation of the relationship with D'yaebel / Journey through the rest of the islands

After their time in Tawarisi, the expedition continued to travel through the remaining 10 islands that comprised the archipelago. During this time, the relationship between D'yaebel and Putnam continued to evolve and improve, reaching a point that could be compared to the bond Putnam had with Tubiel and later with Jolanta until February 1281. On D'yaebel's part, it was comparable to the bond he shared with Kristov, despite their notable differences. They mutually proved to each other, after denying it for a long time, that the good qualities they saw in one another were true and helped them become better, rebuilding themselves by supporting each other.

Ironically, coming from someone whose nickname translated to "the devil," D'yaebel taught Putnam that he was not a burden to anyone. He simply needed to find a place where his "things" fit, not in the idealized sense of a soulmate but in a more realistic way, just as D'yaebel had done with him, even though she couldn't see it for a long time herself. This lesson, like many others, would take time to take effect, albeit less time than before. Because life had another surprise in store for the witcher, one that would test him once again. It was yet another addition to the long list of tribulations that would sanctify him in the future.

Their journey through the rest of the islands was anything but tranquil, as they experienced multiple adventures and misadventures along the way. However, the main source of their unease was not that; it was the fact that, despite their efforts to avoid the civil war and focus on finding Hoseki, they inevitably became entangled in it one way or another beyond their initial unpleasant experience. They often found themselves acting as an external force, opposing the warring factions. In essence, they could be described as vigilantes, much to D'yaeb'l's equal parts dismay and amusement.

In addition to the turmoil of the war, they faced the time-consuming task of investigating and sometimes clearing out monsters from each ruin they encountered in their search for the elf. Many of these ruins turned out to be dead ends, further frustrating and discouraging them. Nonetheless, they persisted, driven by their determination to bring the war to a swift end, knowing that the other Dragon Witchers assigned to carry out backup plans had not achieved success.

Thus, it could be said that their journey was overall frustrating, despite the curiosity sparked by the expedition's unknown and exotic surroundings. However, they made progress in their search despite the slow pace. They even managed to acquire allies along the way who proved quite useful in achieving their objectives. One ally stood out in particular—a samebito who saved Putnam's life by preventing the witcher from drowning. It turned out that this samebito was a close friend of Hoseki and provided them with a clue to her definitive whereabouts. It confirmed that she was on the island of Kami, specifically in pursuit of one of the "eastern dragons" as Istredd would later name the species for the nordlings, this "eastern dragon" was called Shenlong or Shinryu, depending on whom you asked.

The reasons for seeking out such a powerful creature remained unknown, even to the samebito. However, based on his knowledge of Hoseki, he speculated that she was likely going to make an offering to the dragon in exchange for a favor. Perhaps she intended to request the unleashing of a powerful storm on the islands to wipe out the humans, taking advantage of their self-destructive conflict, thus allowing a new reign of the Aen Hagde after the "cleansing".

This added greater urgency to their search. They not only had to end the war as quickly as possible but also had to persuade Hoseki to help them investigate who was responsible for the Emperor's death. Additionally, they needed to prevent her from convincing the mighty dragon to essentially unleash an

apocalypse upon the islands.

D'yaeb'l's death

But that wouldn't be the worst, not for Putnam, as he had already faced significant threats such as the mages of Ofir, among others, although none on the same scale as this. The dragon had the potential to go beyond the Tuyotuki Islands and unleash a true catastrophe in the most horrifying of scenarios. However, the greatest tragedy for Putnam would undoubtedly be the loss of D'yaeb'l, the newfound chance at happiness in his life, snatched away once again with their future plans vanishing into oblivion. Her death would leave a lasting mark on his conscience, adding to the list of traumas he had already endured and causing a setback in his recovery and also in his relationship with Jolanta until around 1381, making their encounter in Vinland a mere glimpse of what could be in the future.

D'yaeb'l's demise would occur in April 1284, in a manner that even the pre-Putnam D'yaeb'l, the ruthless and amoral witcheress, would have found repulsive—through sacrifice. Specifically, she bravely confronted an oni that was about to deliver the final blow to an injured Putnam and Fabio, stepping in to protect them. Her selfless act demonstrated the profound changes she had undergone and how, in the end, she found redemption.

Deeply affected by the loss, Putnam would strive to continue the journey to the best of his abilities. However, before doing so, he would ensure that D'yaeb'l received a dignified farewell—a funeral that honored her memory. In an intimate ceremony attended only by him and Fabio, she would be laid to rest beneath a blossoming cherry tree, surrounded by all her belongings, including the cherished sword she had fought so fiercely for. The sole memento Putnam would keep as a reminder of her would be the brooch she once used to fasten her cloaks, which he would now wear in her honor. This way, he would carry with him the memories of their time together and the invaluable lessons she had taught him, including the unwavering truth that even in the deepest darkness, hope always exists, even if it eludes our sight at times.

Some say that this would not be the last time the witcher would see D'yaeb'l again since rumors circulated back in the day that she carried a secret within her, a secret destined to return and haunt him at a later time. However, as the sanctified figure that Putnam would later become, the line between truth and fiction became increasingly blurred. Skeptics dismissed the stories of D'yaeb'l's

reappearance in Putnam's life as mere embellishments, woven into the tapestry of his mythos. Yet, there were those who fervently clung to the belief that these tales held a kernel of truth, and that destiny had left unfinished business between the Golden Griffin and the Irbis, even though she was dead.

Solving the conflict and cleaning their name

Originally, Putnam didn't believe in the existence of Shenlong. Despite having encountered powerful dragons firsthand, such as Charz in the knight's tournament and Chernobog during his time in Zerrikania, he considered them to be rare occurrences. He mistakenly believed that the Nordling mentality of hunting dragons to the point of near extermination was more prevalent in the world. However, he kept his doubts to himself and simply nodded, continuing the search for Hoseki alongside the others. He already had enough on his plate, grappling with the lingering effects of D'yaeb'l's death on his recovering psyche.

And finally, after that long journey through the Eastern Empire (which had lasted almost a year), they found her, specifically in the ancient ruins located in the underground lake within the extinct volcano of Usu, near the coast, where it was said that the dragon Shenlong had once resided. It was the month of November 1284.

The subsequent encounter between the expedition, accompanied by the Dragon Witchers, and Hoseki could be classified as complicated. Although Hoseki was acquainted with the Dragon Witchers who were part of the group and had even developed a semblance of friendship with some of them, she sensed their purpose and was unwilling to cooperate. She also had some knowledge of Putnam, albeit only through hearsay and his nickname. The ensuing battle was not a physical one per se but rather a battle of words, as they tried to persuade her to reconsider her intentions for the greater good, relying on the speculations shared by the samebito, which unfortunately proved to be accurate.

All of these events transpired due to the fortunate timing of their arrival, coinciding with the moment when Hoseki's offerings and prayers began to take effect, rousing the dragon from its centuries-long slumber in that place after humans had ceased to worship him and turned their devotion to their Emperor instead.

Hoseki argued that humans only knew how to destroy everything, and how every place they set foot on, which was once a paradise, including the Tuyotuki Islands themselves as an example, turned into a horrible place. She believed that

eradicating them from the face of the Earth with the power of the dragon was necessary. On the other hand, the expedition argued that although humanity could commit terrible acts and take time to learn from their mistakes, they were also capable of creating beautiful things, bringing about change, and creating paradises even for those who were different from them.

As the words of Hoseki and the expedition echoed in the air, the atmosphere grew tense, and the fate of their encounter hung in the balance. Each argument carried weight, exposing the complexities of human nature. The clash of perspectives seemed insurmountable, threatening to prolong the impasse indefinitely.

But then, a subtle change began to ripple through the dormant form of Shenlong. As his immense body stirred, the ancient dragon's consciousness awakened, casting a profound presence over the assembly. With a majestic aura emanating from his being, Shenlong projected an air of wisdom and authority that commanded attention.

He listened intently to the arguments presented, observing the conflicting viewpoints with an acute understanding of human nature. Gradually, his piercing gaze scanned the faces of those gathered, peering into their very souls. Shenlong's magic allowed him to delve into their thoughts and emotions, unraveling their true intentions.

The revelations that flooded his mind were a tapestry of human desires, fears, and aspirations. He saw the potential for darkness, but also glimpsed the sparks of goodness that ignited within individuals like Putnam. The witcher's complex journey, with its triumphs and failures, provided a microcosm of humanity's capacity for both greatness and fallibility.

In a moment of clarity, Shenlong raised his colossal head, his voice resonating like thunder across the chamber. He recounted the tales of Putnam's exploits, illustrating the transformative power of choice and the indomitable spirit that could emerge from even the darkest corners of the human heart.

With his words, Shenlong sought to bridge the divide between Hoseki's disillusionment and the expedition's belief in the potential for change. He affirmed that while humans were indeed capable of destruction, they also possessed the innate ability to create, to learn from their mistakes, and to cultivate harmony even with those who were different.

Hoseki's heart was heavy with disappointment, for she had clung to the belief

that the eradication of humanity was the only path to salvation. However, amidst that disappointment, a flicker of hope ignited within her. Perhaps Shenlong, with his ancient wisdom and unfathomable power, held a deeper understanding of the world and its possibilities. After that, the dragon, for his part, simply told her to assist them, assuring her that she would soon witness the truth of his words. And with that, he flew out of the volcano, never to be seen again.

Placing her trust in the colossal dragon, Hoseki resolved to assist the expedition and see where this newfound path would lead. She yearned to witness the truth of Shenlong's words unfold before her very eyes, to discover if the humans could indeed rise above their destructive tendencies and create a world of harmony and beauty.

After that, the expedition, the Dragon Witchers, and Hoseki departed from Kami once again and made their way to Okami. Their primary objective was to allow Hoseki to employ her geomancer abilities at the site where the Imperial Majesty had been slain, in order to unveil the identity of the perpetrators.

In a short span of time, Hoseki revealed that the ones responsible for the Emperor's demise and the tragic events at the port were none other than a ninja clan led by Kumawakamaru. Motivated by a deep-seated thirst for revenge, Kumawakamaru and his followers sought retribution against the Emperor for the execution of Kumawakamaru's father, who had held the position of the Emperor's trusted right-hand. Allegations of corruption had prompted the Emperor to issue the fatal order.

Armed with solid evidence, courtesy of Hoseki's findings, the expedition proceeded to visit the governing regency. They presented the irrefutable proof, compelling the regency to issue a warrant for the capture of the ninja clan. The regency promptly disseminated this information to the warring clans, resulting in an immediate cessation of hostilities. The clans united their forces, pledging to collaborate in the pursuit and capture of Kumawakamaru, who was swiftly apprehended alongside his allies. Justice prevailed, and the perpetrators met their rightful fate through execution.

And for the expedition, having successfully halted the civil war, they found their lost honor restored and received heartfelt gratitude for their pivotal role in bringing about peace. Their remarkable efforts were recognized, and they were bestowed with a bountiful reward, a token of appreciation for their bravery and dedication. The expedition tried to get a new commercial treaty after that, but

unfortunately, it did not succeed. However, they had already located that territory, so perhaps in the future, the kingdom of Lyria and Rivia, through other people, could somehow trade with the eastern empire and benefit from it.

And so, with the passage of a few weeks, the ports of the Tuyotuki Islands once again opened their gates, warmly welcoming foreign ships and revitalizing trade and cultural exchange. Meanwhile, the expedition prepared to depart from the country, embarking on their journey back to the Northern Kingdoms. They carried with them a wealth of lived experiences, valuable treasures obtained during their voyage through the Far East, and the commercial treaties they had forged along the way, thus marking the conclusion of Fabio Sachs' planned first expedition. This extraordinary undertaking served to illuminate the world for the Nordlings, enriching their knowledge and understanding of distant lands and diverse cultures.

In the wake of the expedition's departure, the Tuyotuki Islands underwent a significant transformation. They embraced a brief but pivotal change, embracing an elective monarchy system, empowering the nation to select a new ruling dynasty capable of steering the empire towards a prosperous future. This momentous decision held the promise of a fresh chapter, inspiring hope and anticipation among the eastern islanders as they embarked on a path of renewal and progress.

Return from the Far East (December 1284 - May 1285)

“Farewell, my friend, till we cross paths again, by chance or the gods playing their wild tricks.”

—Putnam's last words to Lukasz

The journey back to the Northern Kingdoms from the Tuyotuki Islands lasted a couple of months, though shorter than expected, thanks to the experience of the captain of the Nilfgaardian Merchant Ship they traveled on. However, not everyone returned with them. Aside from those who perished on the islands, such as D'yaebli, others, like Lukasz, as mentioned before, chose to stay behind, claiming that they had found their place after all this time and had nothing left to return to in the North. Lukasz had no intention of going back to Zerrikania either, as while his time there had been good, it had also been empty.

The School of the Wolf was extinct, and Kaer Morhen was nothing more than abandoned ruins. Moreover, the number of monsters in the North was dwindling.

It didn't justify his return. Additionally, he had developed a fascination with the Tuyotuki Islands, their culture, and their people. Furthermore, the Dragon Witchers needed new members to accelerate their recovery following the "Draconid Uprising" and the civil war. Joining them appeared to be an ideal choice after all the experiences he had gone through, not only during the expedition, and on the islands but also throughout his life. This was his opportunity to start anew, find happiness, and rediscover himself after a long period of being lost. He didn't want to let it slip away.

The expedition felt a sense of loss upon parting ways with Lukasz, as he had not only been a valuable asset but also a dear friend. Nevertheless, they respected his decision and bid him a final farewell. However, before parting ways, Lukasz asked Putnam for one last favor: to act as a messenger and deliver a letter on his behalf. There was someone in the North whom Lukasz still cherished, and he wanted to convey the message that he would be fine wherever he ended up. In the letter, Lukasz expressed his gratitude to this person for everything and assured them that he would always hold them in his heart, even if they never saw each other again. This person was none other than Adalwulf of Aedirn, one of Lukasz's masters during his training, whom the "Lion of Temeria," now transformed into a Dragon Witcher, had come to greatly appreciate. Lukasz instructed Putnam to make his way to Thornwood Manor in Aedirn upon reaching the North, as he would likely find Adalwulf there. Putnam promised to fulfill this request, unknowingly setting the stage for one of the most significant friendships in his life.

Stopover in Sabana to replenish supplies and romance with Yusuri (March - April 1285)

"Mwen renmen ou anpil, my dear witcher. May Destiny bring us together again"
—Yusuri to Putnam in their last moments together.

After Fabio Sachs' 1282 expedition decided to return home after almost three years of traveling the Far East, they were forced to make a stop on the island of Sabana to replenish supplies, remaining there for a month. They stopped in the colony town of New Cintra, where the only port in good condition was available after a hurricane. During that month, as Putnam explored the city and a part of the island, making contracts against unknown monsters that he added to his Witcher bestiary, he began an affair with the town librarian named Yusuri. Curiously, his time in Sabana, together with the time he had spent in Skellige,

would be key, as the island tested Putnam's skills with various types of monsters, but especially flying and some aquatic, though not marine, but river monsters, and the School of the Crane he would find ended up being located in the then still unknown Silk Islands, specifically in the Sachs Mountains on the main island of the archipelago, Hawaiki.

During their extended stay on the island, the expedition diligently utilized their time to repair their ship, ensuring its seaworthiness for the long voyage ahead. They sought out skilled craftsmen from the local population, who with their expertise and resourcefulness, helped restore the vessel to its former glory. With every plank mended and every sail patched, the ship stood ready to brave the treacherous seas once more.

Restocking their supplies was of utmost importance to sustain the crew's physical well-being. The explorers scoured the island, seeking out the finest provisions available. They ventured into bustling markets, where vibrant colors and exotic aromas filled the air. The expedition members engaged in spirited bartering, striking deals with local merchants to acquire an array of essentials, from fresh fruits and vegetables to preserved rations, ensuring a sufficient stockpile for their journey.

Yet, their interactions extended beyond mere transactions. The expedition fostered a genuine curiosity for the island's rich history and diverse culture. They delved into the annals of the island's past, visiting local museums and immersing themselves in the artifacts and tales that spoke of its heritage. With open minds and attentive ears, they sought the wisdom of the island's residents, listening to their narratives and legends that intertwined with the very fabric of the land. Some members of the expedition even took the time to learn some of the island's indigenous languages.

Putnam's interest in battling the local monsters and delving deeper into their nature was sparked by the revelation of the School of the Chameleon's existence on Sabana and the other islands. The Chameleon School, once considered a mythical offshoot of the renowned School of the Viper by Nordling scholars, had also become a subject of legends among the Sabanians. Over time, however, the Chameleon Witchers vanished without a trace, leaving behind a void that jeopardized the safety of the island's inhabitants.

The reasons behind the school's disappearance remained shrouded in mystery, giving rise to speculation among the locals. Some believed that conflicts

between the Nilfgaardian Empire and the Tuyotuki Islands, which fought for control over the [Sundalaic Islands](#) in the past, played a role in the downfall of the Chameleon Witchers. The ensuing power struggles and relentless battles might have led to the eventual demise of the school, leaving the island's population at the mercy of the monsters. This vulnerability forced the locals to construct protective walls, fortifying themselves against the ever-present threat.

This led Putnam to look for more information about these monsters and go to the local library. There, he met Yusuri, the town librarian, and the two began to spend more time together as Putnam researched the island's monsters. Yusuri was able to provide Putnam with valuable information and resources, including old texts and anatomical drawings that helped him better understand the creatures he would hunt. But in his pursuit of knowledge, Putnam not only sought information about the monsters but also yearned to understand the strategies and techniques employed by the Chameleon Witchers. The stories shared by the elderly islanders, who still clung to more or less reliable tales of these witchers, served as invaluable insights into their unique combat methods.

As Putnam's knowledge of the island's monsters grew, he finally decided to take on contracts to help protect the local population, who until then had heavily relied on inexperienced Nilfgaardian soldiers, locals eager to prove their worth, or mages for defense against the monsters. He worked tirelessly, often going out on multiple hunts per day. This worried Yusuri, who on many occasions recommended that he be accompanied by the New Cintran mage for his safety. Putnam encountered monsters that he already knew, although they were few in number, with the majority being unknown to him until then. Examples of familiar monsters included drowners, in their tropical variant, berbalangs (the Sabanian equivalent of ghouls), while among the previously unknown creatures, notable encounters involved berberokas in various reservoirs, a bakunawa, a minokawa, two types of vampires—a wakwak (essentially a pet bird for Higher Vampires) a powerful [mananangall](#) (a distant relative of a bruxa in Sabana, though not reaching the level of a Higher Vampire)—and most importantly, an orange dragon. This experience proved to be useful and crucial in saving in the distant future, his adoptive son, [Ezeld "The Parrot"](#), who would later become one of the first students of the School of the Crane.

During his time on Sabana, Putnam forged strong connections with the local vedyminaicas. Recognizing the value of Putnam's mission to protect the island from its monstrous inhabitants, the vedyminaicas willingly offered their

assistance, sharing invaluable pieces from the vanished School of the Chameleon that they had recovered.

Among the treasures bestowed upon Putnam were the remnants of the Chameleon Witchers' specialized armor, meticulously crafted for the demanding tropical environment. This distinctive armor, which Putnam adopted during his stay on the island, featured a unique blend of materials carefully chosen for their practicality and resilience. The primary components included crocodile skin, renowned for its flexibility, and cured draconid leather, which offered superior durability. To reinforce the armor, small plates of iron or zinc were strategically embedded alongside chainmail, ensuring optimal protection against penetrating attacks.

Designed with agility in mind, the armor was remarkably lightweight, affording Putnam enhanced maneuverability crucial in facing the island's formidable adversaries. Beneath the protective layers, the Chameleon Witchers would don simple Sunda cloth garments such as cotton songket, ulos, or tapis. This choice allowed for unrestricted movement, enabling the witchers to execute swift and precise combat techniques in their relentless pursuit of the island's monstrous threats. Some witchers even adorned themselves with longer armored sarongs, providing additional safeguarding against potential dangers. Something Putnam did on several occasions, following Yusuri's advice.

To complete their formidable appearance, many Chameleon witches donned traditional Sunda headgear, drawing from the rich cultural heritage of the various Sundalandic islands. They chose from an array of options, including the distinctive blangkon and iket, the exquisite kupiah riman, tanjak, udeng, or, on rare occasions, the formidable beluko. These headpieces not only symbolized cultural pride but also served a practical purpose, shielding the witches from the scorching tropical sun while establishing a strong sense of identity rooted in tradition. In Putnam's case, he opted for an udeng, which best suited his long hair.

Footwear played a vital role in the witches' battle-ready attire, meticulously selected to withstand the challenging climate of the islands. Sunda leather sandals, similar to those found in the Tuyotuki Islands, were a popular choice among the witches. These sandals provided a firm grip on the treacherous terrain, ensuring stability and agility during combat. While some witches favored fully-covered shoes or boots, others embraced the barefoot approach, heightening their connection with the land and enhancing their sensory

awareness. Putnam, on the other hand, chose the former option.

Adapting to this new style of armor proved to be a formidable challenge for Putnam, who had grown accustomed to medium-weight gear. However, his tenacity and unwavering commitment allowed him to gradually acclimate to the lightweight armor. Over time, he discovered that this new attire facilitated swift and agile movements, granting him a newfound ease in combating the myriad threats that awaited him on Sabana. With each successful encounter, Putnam grew more proficient in utilizing the advantages provided by the lightweight armor, effectively blending the traditions of the Chameleon Witchers with his own skills and expertise.

Despite his growing fame and success, Putnam remained humble and dedicated to his craft. He understood the inherent danger posed by the monsters of Sabana and recognized that there was still much to learn about them. The locals, in awe of his skills, promptly started referring to him as "kulam" (*literally translated: witcher*) the local name by which the Chameleon Witchers were once known, since they found it challenging to pronounce his name correctly.

Throughout his journey on Sabana, Putnam continued to work closely with Yusuri, the town librarian. Their shared passion for knowledge and the relentless pursuit of protecting the island's inhabitants forged a deep connection between them. As they delved deeper into the secrets of the island's monsters, their bond grew stronger. Yusuri not only provided Putnam with valuable resources and information, but she also became his confidante and source of support that days.

Sooner rather than later, Putnam's unwavering efforts and skillful monster hunting were not only recognized but deeply appreciated by the people of Sabana. In a heartwarming display of gratitude, they bestowed upon him the moniker "Mata Biru Hijau" in the Creole language of the island, which roughly translates to "Green-Blue Eyes," a direct reference to Putnam's striking and distinctive eyes. The islanders admired and respected him for his courage, resilience, and the lives he had saved through his endeavors.

Yusuri, on the other hand, was a shy and introverted young woman who had faced numerous challenges and self-esteem issues, primarily stemming from the tragic loss of her parents. Inheriting the library from them, she found solace within its walls, but it also served as a constant reminder of the pain and grief she had experienced. Her unique appearance, with her dark skin, slanted blue

eyes, and black hair, reflected her heritage, a blend of Nilfgaardian, Tuyotukian, and Melukkan ancestry.

Putnam was deeply drawn to Yusuri's intelligence and her unwavering passion for knowledge. He recognized her as an invaluable asset in his quest to understand the monsters of the island, and he made a point of including her in his research. He admired her determination, seeing her as much more than just a librarian but a true partner in their endeavors.

Yusuri, in turn, found herself drawn to Putnam's unwavering strength and his role as her protector and guide. She saw him as a real-life embodiment of the heroic figures she had encountered in the books she cherished. Putnam's presence and unwavering support gave her the courage to confront her fears and doubts. She trusted him implicitly, later viewing him as her own personal prince charming.

Their shared experiences, such as loneliness and the pain of losing important people in their lives, along with their passion for knowledge, brought them closer intellectually and emotionally. They discovered a profound connection that transcended their individual roles, forming a strong bond that went beyond professional collaboration. Soon, the seed of love was sown in their hearts, and they found themselves irresistibly drawn to one another.

But alas, as the month on the island drew to a close, they knew they had to bid farewell. It was a bittersweet parting, for in that short span of time, they had forged a profound and meaningful connection. Putnam made a heartfelt promise to return to Sabana one day, and Yusuri clung to the hope of their paths crossing again, cherishing the memories they had created together.

However, despite their promises and genuine intentions to reunite, fate had other plans in store for them. Life's unpredictable twists and turns took them on separate journeys, leading them down divergent paths. Time and distance kept them apart, and circumstances beyond their control ensured that they would never see each other again. Their love story, though cut short, remained etched in the depths of their memories, a lingering reminder of the depth of their affection and the love that could have blossomed.

Years later, when reminiscing about his time on Sabana, Putnam would think of Yusuri with a mix of nostalgia and fondness. He would wonder what might have been and how their lives could have unfolded together. And perhaps, in the

depths of his heart, he held onto the faint hope that one day, against all odds, their paths might intertwine once more, and their unfinished love story would find its resolution.

As for Yusuri, she treasured the time she had spent with Putnam as a transformative chapter in her life. He had shown her the depths of her own potential, igniting a fire within her that would burn brightly for years to come. Their love story became a guiding light, reminding her of the strength she had discovered through their profound connection.

Driven by her newfound purpose, Yusuri dedicated herself to preserving the history and knowledge of the region, particularly the legacy of the School of the Chameleon witches. She poured her heart and soul into expanding the library, tirelessly amassing a wealth of information on the Sunda islands, its witches, and the creatures they faced. Her relentless pursuit of knowledge and her unwavering commitment to her cause paid off, propelling her to become a respected historian and esteemed researcher in her own right, having a university named in her honor.

Visit to Thornwood Manor (June 1285)

“You've met Jolanta, right? ... She's a bit like a swirling vortex of emotions and unpredictability. One moment she's raising a toast to victory, and the next she's ready to duel with the entire tavern. It's all part of her "feline charm", I suppose. Keeps life interesting, doesn't it?”

—Putnam to Adalwulf shortly after they formally met.

Upon arriving in the Northern Kingdoms, Putnam made his way to [Thornwood Manor](#), following Lukasz's instructions. The imposing estate stood amidst the lush greenery, emanating an air of mystery and intrigue. As he approached the grand entrance, Putnam's heart swelled with anticipation, wondering what destiny awaited him on the other side.

Inside, he was met with an atmosphere of quiet elegance, as if time itself had slowed within the walls of the manor. As he presented himself and the letter to the household, word quickly spread of his arrival and the purpose of his visit. Adalwulf, now a revered figure in his own right, emerged from the depths of the manor, his piercing eyes reflecting the wisdom gained through years of training and experience.

Both of them knew each other, even if only by reputation. Putnam had heard

stories about Adalwulf, especially from the dwarves, during his time in Mahakam when he himself had taken part in one of the so-called "Spring Cleansings." He had also heard tales from Lukasz about Adalwulf. On the other hand, Adalwulf had heard a bit of everything about Putnam, both good and bad, being the "closest source" when he encountered a very drunk Jolanta in a tavern as she vented her frustrations about Putnam and her recent ex-partner, a knight from Toussaint named Alexandre Nokta Laurent de Valois, who had abandoned her to pursue "the greater good" following Lebioda's teachings. Adalwulf had to escort the witcheress out of there to prevent her from starting a fight with the customers. This knowledge of the existence of each other alleviated any possible tensions between the two as Putnam delivered the letter.

As Adalwulf immersed himself in
Lukasz's heartfelt words, he couldn't

help but be overcome by a myriad of emotions. Pride swelled within him, like a mighty wave, as he realized the extent of Lukasz's growth and transformation into a formidable witcher. It was a testament to Adalwulf's guidance and teachings, and he couldn't help but feel a deep sense of satisfaction. Yet, mingling with this pride was a tinge of melancholy, a bittersweet reminder of the fleeting nature of their interactions and the ephemeral connections life offered.

Putnam, always respectful and considerate, conveyed Lukasz's profound gratitude and the unwavering place Adalwulf held within his heart. Those words resonated deeply with the veteran witcher, echoing through the chambers of his soul. They served as a poignant reminder of the profound impact he had made on Lukasz's life and the bond they shared.

And so, the hours slipped away as Adalwulf and Putnam engaged in a captivating conversation. Despite the stark contrast in their ages, with Adalwulf nearing two centuries at the ripe age of 164, and Putnam having recently celebrated his thirtieth birthday, the connection between them was palpable. They exchanged stories, wisdom, and laughter, their camaraderie growing with each passing minute. It was a meeting of minds, a union of experiences, and a celebration of their shared calling as witchers. In that moment the seeds of a lasting friendship were sown, their roots reaching deep into the soil of mutual respect and admiration.

As darkness descended upon the world outside, Adalwulf, ever the gracious host, extended an invitation to Putnam to stay the night in the grand mansion. The weary traveler hesitated briefly, torn between his eagerness to reunite with

Marina and the allure of respite within the opulent walls of the estate. Eventually, he relented, recognizing the opportunity for rest and the chance to explore the amenities the mansion had to offer.

The following day, as the sun began its ascent in the sky, casting its warm glow upon the world, Putnam bid farewell to Adalwulf and the mansion that had provided him solace. His heart brimmed with gratitude for the veteran witcher's generosity and wisdom. With a refreshed spirit and renewed determination, he set his sights on the path that led to Lyria, ready to be with Marina again not knowing what surprises his reencounter with the tavern keeper would bring him.

"Same old roads, different paths" (July 1285)

After completing his visit to Thornwood Mansion in Aedirn and delivering the letter to Adalwulf, Putnam continued his journey with the next objective of seeing Marina once again. Since the death of D'yaebel and, especially, his breakup with Yusuri, he had been consumed by thoughts of the half-elf. Despite his lingering fear of potentially bringing her misfortune (as he believed had happened with Tubiel, Nabla, and D'yaebel), he steadfastly clung to the hope that their reunion would not be plagued by such ill fate. Marina had proven to him during their time together in 1281 that many of his fears, born from his past traumas, were unfounded when he was in her presence. Putnam yearned to return and bring to life the dreams they had discussed before their painful separation, especially now that he had obtained his rightful share of the expedition's wealth. His mind brimmed with ideas, contemplating the refurbishment of the tavern, acquiring exquisite dresses for Marina, and so much more.

And what about Jolanta at that time? Well, Jolanta had suffered a head injury while dealing with a contract involving an experiment gone wrong in Rissberg, a sort of "hybrid Leshen," one could say, that had found its way to Brugge and settled in the kingdom's forests. Despite successfully defeating the experiment, she suffered complete amnesia from the blow to her head. Fortunately, she was found by a young farmer from the area who rescued her and took care of her. The two of them developed a brief romance during her recovery, but everything changed when her memory was fully restored. The resurfaced memories of her past drove her to embark on a long quest for revenge upon learning that her adoptive father, Pardus of Korath, had been killed by a company of bounty hunters. This quest eventually led her to the duchy of Vinland, where fate would

reunite her with Putnam the following year.

With that said, let's return with the Golden Griffin. Due to the close proximity between the two kingdoms, Putnam's journey was swift, and he arrived at his destination in July 1285. However, as soon as he set foot on the once lively grounds of the tavern that had brought him so much joy, his heart sank. The tavern, a place that had once been a sanctuary for him, now lay in ruins, reduced to nothing but charred remains. The sight of the devastated structure shattered his illusions and dashed his hopes.

In that moment of despair, one name echoed in his mind like a desperate plea—Marina. He couldn't bear the thought of her being caught in the blaze or suffering any harm. His heart raced, and without a second thought, he rushed towards the remnants of The Red Crow. Once inside, the scene was heart-wrenching. The familiar interior, where laughter and camaraderie among different non-humans had once thrived, now lay in ruins of ashes and soot. The air was heavy with the scent of charred wood, and the faint echoes of crackling flames lingered like ghostly whispers.

Yet, amidst the devastation, there was no sign of Marina. He searched tirelessly through the remnants of what was once the kitchen, the clinic, and even the room they had shared. However, there was no trace of the half-elf. His thoughts spiraled to the worst-case scenario, and his fears, born from his traumas, found justification, even if it was based on a fallacy. These were the kind of dangers he had sought to protect Jolanta from (although in her case, these dangers were much more psychological and related to the traumas he carried with him), that's why he had abandoned her and left a letter.

It wasn't until he recalled a Keldar's advice that a glimmer of hope pierced through his despair. He took a deep breath, calming himself, and resolved to continue the search. The absence of a corpse in the ruins meant that, just maybe, Marina could still be alive.

Now calm, he left the incinerated
ruins of the Red Crow and
continued his determined search for Marina. Venturing off the main roads, he
meticulously combed through the forest surrounding the tavern, utilizing all his
witcher skills to his advantage in tracking her down. However, his efforts yielded
no trace of the half-elf. The only clue that began to shed light on what had
happened were the corpses of several members of a Scoia'tael guerrilla, now

being mercilessly devoured by a jackapace. This monstrous creature, a hybrid born from the Rissberg castle experiments, combined the genes of a shaelmaar with those of other insectoids, sold to various kingdoms to exterminate persistent Squirrel guerrillas. The grisly scene before him demonstrated the destructive capabilities of these deadly hybrids.

The thought nagged at him: What did Marina have to do with all of this? Until that moment, he had believed her to be a simple tavern keeper, providing a safe haven for non-humans in her home and workplace. But now he couldn't help but wonder—had she been a collaborator or part of the Scoia'tael all along? This could explain her occasional and enigmatic absences when they were together. Yet, he had always assumed those absences were her time to practice with the crossbow she owned.

A torrent of questions and worries flooded his mind, intensifying the fear that the half-elf might have met a far more dreadful fate than perishing in the fire that consumed her tavern.

Still, he maintained his composure and without further delay, prepared to confront the monster, fervently hoping that, by all the gods, including the deity Freya whom he still followed, it had nothing to do with Marina's fate. He fought against it as he would against a shaelmaar, a challenging but not insurmountable battle. The Far East had honed his skills through countless experiences, and in the end, he emerged victorious. Exhausted but with no time to rest, he immediately began to dissect and examine the monster's innards, searching for any trace of his beloved Marina. Fortunately, he found nothing, allowing him to breathe a sigh of relief, though a tinge of frustration remained as he still didn't know her whereabouts.

It became evident that the monster had been deployed to eliminate a faction of the guerrilla fighters attempting to rescue their captured comrades. This deduction came after conducting a thorough investigation of the area. It wasn't until he emerged from the forest and returned to the main roads that he overheard a group of men headed towards the city of Lyria, eager to witness the execution of "filthy elves" in the public square. Finally, an opportunity for information presented itself. Could Marina be there? He couldn't say for certain, but based on all he had witnessed, it appeared to be the most plausible option. Besides, within the city, he could make inquiries about her. If she wasn't there, he was confident he could gather more concrete leads.

He arrived in Lyria at dusk. The atmosphere in the city was tense, although not to the point of erupting into a pogrom, the feeling was similar. People clamored for "justice" in the streets, and the hatred towards those who were different (meaning non-humans) could be felt in the air. Putnam, therefore, pulled up his hood and blended in with the crowd, determined to find out if the half-elf was in that place or if he would have to travel farther. His first stop, as it couldn't be otherwise, was the non-human district, in search of the friends he had made there four years ago while helping them with their monster problems. It seemed like the most reasonable option since they also knew Marina, as many of them were regular patrons of her tavern.

When the witcher returned to the non-human district, he was not greeted with cheers or applause, but he was met with joy by the non-humans who saw him. It was a relief after enduring all sorts of racist insults, primarily targeting elves but with a few directed towards him as well. There was even a close call for a brawl when several people recognized him as a witcher while he was making his way to that part of the city. Thankfully, he managed to avoid a fight.

The non-humans who recognized him immediately led him to Krask, the leader of the ghetto and a vran tailor, which was a rarity considering that most vrans were confined to reservations and nearly extinct. Putnam had originally met Krask through Marina a few days after they had started their relationship when they went shopping together in the city. As a good friend, Krask filled him in on everything that had happened during his nearly three-year absence, bringing him up to date with the latest developments.

Thanks to Krask, he learned that the situation for them had sadly worsened. Although the favor Putnam had obtained for them after speaking with Queen Meve had been beneficial, relieving some of the burden of extra taxes they were being charged, it had also fueled increased hatred towards them. The human population labeled them as "privileged," further intensifying the violence. This sparked a pang of guilt in the witcher, as he had not foreseen the consequences that his noble gesture would bring. Could this be a reason for Marina's tavern being burned down? Was it a hateful attack due to her supposed "privilege"? He hoped not, for if that were the case, he would certainly feel more "cursed" and believe that he only brought misfortune to the women he loved for.

Krask, knowing Putnam's purpose in visiting, although the witcher didn't say, wasted no time and immediately began divulging information about Marina and her potential whereabouts. It didn't take long for Putnam to uncover that the

issue of taxes, while a contributing factor, was far from the primary reason for the escalating turmoil. It was merely one spark in the fire that now raged fiercely. Nevertheless, Putnam couldn't escape the overwhelming waves of guilt and self-loathing, feeling as though he had once again "doomed" a woman he loved.

As the conversation progressed, Putnam finally unearthed the principal motive and gained further insights into Marina's situation. The truth struck him with astonishment, not because he passed judgment and considered her "evil" for doing so, but because it contradicted the image he held of Marina. It appeared that while she wasn't directly involved with the Scoia'tael, she had collaborated with them as a smuggler. In an unfortunate turn of events, Marina had been apprehended and taken captive. Her execution was imminent, possibly even scheduled for that very night, alongside several other members, according to what Krask had heard.

Although, as mentioned before, Putnam was taken aback by this revelation, he didn't judge her. He himself had done questionable things throughout his life, especially after Tubiel's death, and he had no right to pass judgment. He simply hadn't expected it, but Marina must have had her reasons for collaborating. However, at that moment, it didn't matter. What was important was to locate her and, with luck, save her and take her to a safe place.

After the meeting, Putnam thanked Krask for his assistance and set off. It wasn't the most precise lead, but it would be enough to find her. There were only two places to look: the city's prison or the central square. That was more than he had expected to obtain. The biggest challenge, whether she was in jail or scheduled for execution in the central square that very night, was time, which was not on his side.

So, Putnam opted for the following plan to rescue Marina. He would first go to the square, observe for a while, and if he didn't find her among those to be executed, he would proceed to the city's prison, infiltrate it, and rescue her. The advantage of the second option was that it was less urgent. He knew that if she was still there, she would still be alive, as the "spectacle" of the execution also mattered in such cases.

Without further hesitation, Putnam mounted his horse once again and made his way towards the central square. The crowd had gathered in anticipation of the appearance of the Scoia'tael, making it nearly impossible to pass through. He had to leave his horse a short distance away if he wanted to navigate the area

and get as close as possible to where the elves were to be executed. His mutant witcher vision, as sharp as a telescope, allowed him to observe from afar, but if Marina was among those destined to die that night, he would need to get closer.

Many thoughts swirled in his mind at that moment, but one in particular kept resurfacing, born from the pain he had carried for so many years and the newfound pain of potentially losing Marina. He had to save her, to honor the sacrifices of Tubiel, Caldigi, Vargos, D'yaeb'l, and the others. Even if it meant his own demise, he couldn't bear to see that woman, who had saved him from himself almost as much as Jolanta had, die in such a tragic and premature manner.

It was a beautiful summer night, yet simultaneously dreadful due to what was about to unfold. In another reality, he and Marina would be enjoying the starry sky outside the tavern, searching for constellations together. But that was not the case now. It was a pity that Meve wasn't in the city either, as perhaps he could have spoken to her once more and prevented this tragedy. Nevertheless, these were thoughts that emerged as he waited alongside the rest of the crowd for the execution, trying to distract himself from the nervousness that threatened to consume him. Although the waiting time was short, it felt like an eternity to Putnam.

As the condemned began to ascend to the execution site, Putnam fixed his gaze and concentration, searching for any sign of Marina's presence among the elves who would meet their demise that day. For a brief moment, hope flickered as he didn't see the half-elf among those ascending. However, that hope, just like when he arrived at the burned tavern, quickly dissipated as Marina appeared, being the last to ascend.

After that, the sentences were read, and the Scoia'tael and Marina were positioned in their respective places. The Squirrels would be burned at the stake, a reminder of the cruel witch hunts from nearly a decade ago. As for the tavern keeper, for the crime of collaborating with them, she would suffer an exemplary punishment, a death no less horrifying than being burned alive—the gallows.

She looked terrible, in tattered clothes and bruised. She had been treated poorly. But even so, she was as beautiful as he remembered, with that vitiligo that some found unattractive but that he adored. Rage surged within him, a desire for vengeance against those who had done this to her and who knows what else. But he restrained himself and regained his focus. He needed to keep a clear mind for

this moment. He had a minimum of 15 minutes to ascend and rescue her, assuming the hanging was successful.

His mind raced as soon as he saw her, and in a split second, he had a plan to free her from the clutches of death. It was true that it would involve the other Scoia'tael members dying, but it was a sacrifice he was willing to accept so that the tavern keeper could continue to embody and exemplify values such as tolerance and integration, which the now-ruined Red Crow tavern had once represented. In essence, he would let the other Scoia'tael members die and burn at the stake, and taking advantage of the pinnacle moment, which he was certain would be Marina's hanging, he would burst in, defeat the guards and other city personnel present, rescue her, and take her to a safe place.

It was true that he would expose himself, that they might consider him a criminal afterward, and that he would once again break his neutrality in a more profound manner than before. However, none of that mattered to him when it came to Marina.

He allowed the execution to unfold as planned. It was never a pleasant experience to witness, even for someone like him accustomed to death more than others. Nonetheless, he made the effort, observing as another member of the crowd, watching the elves burn, smelling the scent of charred flesh, hearing their screams of pain, and witnessing the terror on the faces of those about to meet the flames. Notable names who died that night included Gallatin, Dara, Seanchaí, Éile and Zacaré. He remained impassive until he saw the final adjustments being made to Marina's gallows. Gradually, he moved closer, gently pushing aside the people, making his way to the area where the city guards stood.

"Hold on, Marina, I'm coming," he thought, listening to the last words spoken by the half-elf. Before anything else could happen, he unleashed a powerful Aard, knocking down the guards who were keeping watch over the execution site. This created enough distraction to prevent the tavern keeper from being hanged. Taking advantage of the attention now focused on him, both from Marina's executioners and the bewildered citizens of Lyria, he engaged in combat. Utilizing a combination of repeated Aard Signs, his physical training, and his mutant witcher abilities, he fought. His goal was not to harm anyone but to rescue someone who didn't deserve such a horrific fate.

He swiftly arrived at the gallows area, the air thick with tension and the scent of impending death. With a single decisive strike of his Scorpion Steel Saber, he severed the rope that held Marina's life in a precarious balance, freeing her from the clutches of certain doom. Marina, her voice trembling, questioned him about his identity and his reasons for this daring act of salvation. In response, Putnam removed his hood, revealing his face, and with a voice filled with unwavering determination, he uttered, "I am someone who loves you."

Their eyes locked, and in that moment, a torrent of emotions surged between them. Marina's eyes welled up with tears, a mixture of relief, disbelief, and overwhelming gratitude. Putnam, with a tender and understanding gaze, extended a hand to gently wipe away her tears, offering a small reassurance amidst the chaos surrounding them. But there was no time for lingering in the emotions of their reunion. The urgency of their escape loomed over them.

Casting a quick glance at Marina, Putnam ensured that she had not suffered any grievous injuries that could impede their flight to safety. Satisfied that she was physically unharmed, except for a few bruises, he scooped her up into his arms, cradling her fragile form with both strength and tenderness. Seizing the momentary distraction caused by his intervention in the execution, they surged forward, leaving behind the pandemonium and confusion in their wake.

With swift and determined steps, they raced towards the awaiting horse, their only means of freedom. The city guards, now in hot pursuit, trailed closely behind. Every second felt precious as they rode out of the city gates, their escape teetering on the edge of success and capture. The horse galloped tirelessly, carrying them away from the clutches of imminent danger, while the night sky bore witness to their desperate flight.

Hunt for the people responsible for it and abandonment of the riches of the expedition and Marina

After narrowly escaping Lyria, Marina and Putnam set their course, as the witcher had planned, for a safe location. Their destination was none other than an abandoned mage's tower, one of the many that were scattered across the landscape of the kingdom after it became trendy among mages to settle there, which Putnam had discovered a few days before meeting Marina in 1281. He had spent a night there in the past. Despite its proximity to the city, he knew that no one would search for them there. Pursuing a mere tavern keeper turned smuggler, especially now that the guerrillas were no more, would be a futile and

wasteful endeavor. Putnam had made the deliberate choice not to save them, hoping it would quell the people's bloodlust. Therefore, they would patiently wait for the "storm" to pass and decide what to do next.

The tower, despite everything, was in a reasonably decent state. There was dust and some damage, but with a few repairs, it could quickly transform into a comfortable home. Its preservation was likely due to a gradually weakening spell, which explained why it hadn't deteriorated further. The architecture exhibited clear Nordling influences, with a distinct Vran foundation and subtle Elven embellishments.

Upon their arrival at the tower, Putnam's first task was to make it habitable for Marina. Then, he carefully attended to her wounds, providing necessary treatment and preparing a soothing hot bath. Initially, Marina insisted that she was fine and didn't require any special attention, but Putnam's stubbornness won out. Eventually, she relented and allowed him to tend to her injuries, revealing additional injuries that had been hidden by her tattered clothing during her time in prison.

With tenderness, love, and delicacy, Putnam tended to Marina's wounds, carefully dressing them and occasionally placing gentle kisses where he could. Each touch was a reassurance of his affection and a silent promise that everything would be alright. A hushed silence settled between them, punctuated only by the soft sound of their movements and the tender caresses. As he applied the healing treatments and secured the bandages, Putnam found solace in these intimate moments.

However, for Marina, the atmosphere grew tense, and tears welled up in her eyes. She gazed at Putnam, fearing his judgment and rejection as she tried to explain everything that had transpired during his absence. She recounted her collaboration with the Scoia'tael and more, burdened by the belief that her actions would brand her as a monster in his eyes.

But Putnam didn't respond with anger or condemnation. He didn't insult her or turn away. Instead, he cradled her face in his hands, gently wiping away her tears, and offered her a comforting smile. There was no need for her to justify herself, for he understood the complexities of the panhuman nature. In that moment, he shared with her one of his deepest secrets—the criminal bands he had slain after Tubiel's death. It was a revelation that even she, with whom he had shared intimate details, did not know. And in his confession, he

acknowledged the duality of his actions—both necessary and also flawed. Most of those men he had killed in his quest for revenge had families and deserved a chance at redemption, rather than merely facing a brutal punishment. Putnam recognized that making mistakes was an inherent part of being a conscious being.

Putnam spoke to her with calmness and wisdom without neglecting the remorse in his voice when it came to his mistakes. A glimpse of how he would be in the future as the grandmaster of the School of the Crane—a wise, attentive, understanding, and kind grandmaster. A leader who wouldn't command but led and exemplified, both in good and bad times.

His words served to calm the half-elf and enable her to progress after the traumatic experience. They faced a long journey ahead if they wanted Marina to reclaim her former life, or at least something resembling it. With one of those smiles that had enamored Marina, and a kindness and compassion that would further justify his eventual sanctification in the distant future, the witcher took charge of preparing dinner and ensuring their stay would be as comfortable as possible. They would reside there for a while, at least until they determined their next steps and what was necessary. Putnam insisted that Marina rest as much as possible, and he nearly succeeded. However, he was defeated in the battle to prepare dinner alone, as Marina didn't allow it. She insisted it was the least she could do after he had saved her life.

And so, after nearly three long years of separation, Marina and Putnam found themselves reunited once more. The weight of their time apart hung heavily in the air, filling the space between them with unspoken words and bittersweet longing. Marina, unable to find the right words to express the magnitude of her emotions, remained silent.

After the dinner, they prepared themselves for rest. Marina, overcome with a surge of yearning, slipped into the bed they would share and embraced Putnam with a fervent grip. In that embrace, her touch conveyed a mixture of strength and desperation, as if she was silently pleading for him to never leave her side again. It was an unspoken plea, an unconscious expression of her deepest desires.

But the world they inhabited was a complex one, where paths intertwined and diverged, and fate had a way of weaving its intricate tapestry. Although their feet may tread the same familiar roads, the threads of their lives had been pulled in

different directions. Life had prepared separate and distinct paths for each of them, paths that they would soon be compelled to confront.

The witcher, that night, due to exhaustion, finally succumbed to sleep. However, his slumber was plagued by haunting nightmares that relentlessly tormented his mind. Tubiel, D'yaebel, and Jolanta appeared in them, their memories intertwined, amplifying his failures and serving as painful reminders of the tragic fate that seemed to befall every woman he deeply loved (with the exception of Jolanta since he abandoned her). It was as if a cruel destiny had ordained him to walk an even more solitary path than usual for witches, forever punished for his perceived failures in protecting "his" redheads, Sigurd, and the once cherished members of his adoptive family among the Griffins. He felt unworthy of any affection, believing himself responsible for the loss of the pure love he once cherished.

With a start, he awoke, his body drenched in cold sweat, his breathing heavy. Marina still slumbered peacefully beside him, her tiredness a testament to the ordeals she had endured. The first rays of the morning sun gently illuminated the room, casting a hopeful glow on the new day ahead.

He got out of bed, dressed, combed his hair, and applied perfume to mask any lingering traces of sweat. Although it wasn't a "special occasion" in the traditional sense, like a grand gala at court or the like, he used up the remaining perfume he had, believing that Marina deserved to be greeted that morning with a pleasant scent. In a way, it was special to reunite with her after such a long time. He had breakfast as he usually did at The Path, in silence, immersed in the soothing sounds of nature, while observing the horse grazing nearby. Before that, he had prepared something for Marina and left it on the bed, anticipating her awakening.

He took the opportunity to gather his thoughts, for he needed it. Reflection was necessary to process the nightmares that plagued his mind, to contemplate his future, and determine what he truly desired. He longed to be with Marina, an intense desire burning within him, and he yearned to leave the past behind, both the distant and recent. However, the fear of bringing her misfortune and experiencing yet another devastating loss, like those he had suffered before, gnawed at him like termites on wood. Though he initially believed he could resist the onslaught of these thoughts, dismissing them as an exaggeration borne out of his past experiences, he couldn't reach a clear conclusion at that moment as he embarked on his day.

By the time Marina awoke, noon had already arrived, and Putnam had used the morning hours to attend to various tasks within the tower. It was only when the half-elf was alert and present that he ceased his activities, choosing instead to spend the afternoon of that summer day in her company, delving into other matters. Their main objective was to catch up on the events and experiences that had shaped their lives during their time apart, temporarily setting aside the tragedies they had endured and the current state of their relationship. Despite their mutual decision to end their romantic involvement due to Putnam's choice to join Fabio's expedition, an undeniable connection still existed between them.

Moreover, from Putnam's perspective, he was hesitant to define their relationship again until Marina, as mentioned before, had regained some semblance of her former life. The primary concern now was for her to regain her strength and find her footing once again. In this regard, Putnam offered his support, mirroring the assistance Fabio had once provided him in the past.

In the days that followed, although they could be described as "strange," they also held a certain "bucolic" charm, as if they were a magnifying memory of their relationship in 1281. During those nights, they finally had the opportunity to gaze at the stars together.

And so, gradually, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, Marina began to emerge from her emotional shell. Eventually, the day arrived when she finally mustered the courage to open up about what had happened. Putnam had refrained from pressing for details, understanding firsthand how difficult it was to discuss traumatic events and the time it took to process them. Marina started by sharing fragments of her time in prison, gradually expanding on her experiences until they reached the starting point of her ordeal. She even disclosed to him, just as he had revealed the truth about the criminals, the tragic story of her parents' death during the Lyrian Pogrom and her subsequent involvement with the Scoia'tael under the tutelage of Aodhan Vaerney. These were things she had kept hidden before—the former due to its intimate nature and the latter out of fear that Putnam would perceive her as a monster but that was different now.

During those days, the witcher played the role of a compassionate listener, absorbing the weight of her words and offering solace in any way he could. Finally gaining a deeper understanding of Fabio's experience in 1280 as he had cared for him after Tubiel's death.

It was only when she finally revealed the names of those responsible for the

tavern fire and her capture, a group of four half-elves who had been promised a fortune in exchange for information on the Lyrian Scoia'tael Guerrilla if they acted as informants, that his demeanor changed. The thirst for justice and revenge (though not in the same manner as in 1280) resurfaced within him, and he proposed to Marina the idea of capturing them and allowing her to administer the punishment she saw fit, unaware that it would mark the end of their time together once and for all.

Marina accepted, and in the following days, they spent their time devising a plan together. Marina was acquainted with them, as they had been patrons of the tavern for many years. With her knowledge, Putnam quickly gathered information about their routines, personalities, and more. During this time, Putnam also presented Marina with a kimono brought from the Tuyotuki Islands, so she wouldn't have to wear the tattered clothes she had on during her capture. Although they had been cleaned, they remained unsightly and unsuitable for someone like her. Interestingly, this kimono would become one of the cherished mementos that Marina would hold dear from him.

The plan was simple: a kidnapping, with the captives being taken to the ruins of the Red Crow. Fortunately, their targets lived on the outskirts, though still in close proximity to the city, so he had to be careful in case the authorities were still pursuing him. Marina would wait at her former tavern. Although she no longer possessed her crossbow, which had been burned, she wielded a machete she had found in the tower and claimed as her own. Putnam wasn't particularly fond of kidnappings, having experienced one himself, but he set aside his reservations for Marina's sake and to serve as the instrument of what the Melukkans would deem karma.

Once set in motion, the plan unfolded smoothly. However, within the witcher's mind, his thoughts had gradually succumbed entirely to paranoia, convinced that being in close proximity to her would inevitably result in tragedy. He couldn't bear the thought of witnessing her death in his arms, or worse, blaming himself for it. Despite these concerns, he chose not to reveal his inner turmoil to Marina, knowing she would likely dismiss it as baseless worries. In the event of her potential demise, he dreaded the overwhelming guilt he believed he would experience once again.

In the first part, Putnam carefully left Marina in the forest near the ruins of the tavern, knowing that she would patiently wait until the following day to confront the informants and seek justice for the harm they had caused to her and the

tavern. They chose this secluded location, despite believing that the possibility of patrols searching for Marina was slim. Adhering to the adage "better safe than sorry," Putnam set out on his mission to find and kidnap the informants, determined to bring them to the ruins of the Red Crow.

The second part revolved around the execution of the kidnappings, which Putnam executed with precision. Utilizing the Somme Sign, he induced a deep sleep upon each informant and efficiently loaded them onto his horse, who faithfully carried the burden of his efforts. Expressing his gratitude, Putnam later rewarded his loyal companion for its unwavering support. Transporting the informants to the ruins of the Red Crow, he carefully immobilized them, adhering to the plan he had previously discussed with Marina.

It was during this critical moment that life intervened, mercilessly fueling Putnam's already burgeoning paranoia to its maximum extent. Consumed by his fears and concerns, he made the difficult decision to abandon Marina, following a similar path he had taken with Jolanta in the past, albeit driven by different motivations. This time, his actions were driven by a deep desire to protect Marina from the perceived misfortune that he believed he brought upon those he cared for. Determined to shield her from the potential consequences of his presence, he chose to withdraw from her life, even though it pained him to do so. There was no letter to explain his departure this time. Instead, Putnam opted for a different approach, symbolizing his final act of love and selflessness. He decided to relinquish his share of the wealth acquired from the expedition, leaving it behind for Marina's benefit. By placing the wealth in the area that had once been their shared room, he sought to convey his unwavering affection for her and communicate indirectly that his actions were motivated solely by love.

The druidess (November 1285 - March 1286)

"Listen up, Witcher, 'cause I've got a tale that'll make your silver sword quiver in its sheath. Big ol' bugger with fur like a thunderstorm and eyes that could make ya piss yourself. I'm no fancy wordsmith, mind ya, but I swear on me ma's grave, I've never seen anything like it. One minute it's a normal bison, chewin' grass all innocent-like, and the next, it's growlin' and snarlin', turning into some unholy creature right before me bleeding eyes! I tell ya, I didn't stick around to see what happened next. Grabbed me sword and ran like the devil himself was on me tail! Proper terrifying, it was. But don't ya dare think I lost me nerve, mate. I'm a tough bloke, and I've seen me fair share of scraps, but that werebison, it's a whole

different kettle o' fish. Aye, it's a story I won't be forgettin' anytime soon, that's for sure!"

—Anonymous Caravan Guard at the thermae of Aedd Gynvael, November 1285.

After abandoning Marina, Putnam continued his travels and practiced his profession along the way, setting his course for Kovir with the intention of returning to Kaer Seren. He predominantly traveled by ship, which significantly reduced his travel time, exchanging his services for dealing with river monsters and protecting the crews. He frequently encountered vodyanoi and drowners. He felt a pressing need to see Keldar once again and seek his advice, even if it meant enduring the grumpy witcher's scolding. Additionally, he longed for the companionship and guidance of the remaining members of the School of the Griffin. Furthermore, he sought to apologize to them for the events that unfolded at his wedding with Tubiel. Ever since the death of the Lioness of Brenna five years ago, he had never felt more lost, alone, and broken than during these days. Apart from his profession, he grappled with a sense of purposelessness in his life. It was unfortunate that Frey, the loyal dog he had saved during the expedition's time in the Tuyotuki Islands, could not speak. Putnam was certain that if the animal could speak, it would offer him guidance and support beyond its unwavering loyalty. In those days, he also thought of writing to Adalwulf, with whom since his visit to Thornwood Manor, he kept some correspondence (not as much as with Jalast, it must be said) but he did not want to bother the, by that time, Wolf, with what he considered his "nonsense".

But the witcher, at least that year, would not return to his home, to the fortress that had witnessed his growth and shaped him into who he was in that moment. His path would cross with Alanna's, opening another chapter in his complicated romantic life. While relatively minor compared to figures like Jolanta, Marina, D'yaebi, Kai Yih, or the yet to come Mazheva, it would hold its own significance.

Their story would begin when Putnam, passing through Aedd Gynvael to pay a visit to Istredd and see how he was doing, came across a contract in the city that caught his attention, and he accepted it. The contract involved a werebison that was terrorizing the forests near the city. This creature had been the target of several hunters and mercenaries, but none had succeeded, and many ended up dead or badly injured, making it a topic of gossip among the people. Rumors even circulated that the werebison was once a notorious killer who had escaped from the city's prison and, in the process, was cursed with bisontropy, a rare type of

therianthropy not commonly found in other parts of the Northern Kingdoms but prevalent in that area and places in the Far North like Vinland. Istredd offered to lend a hand, but Putnam declined, not wanting the mage to interrupt his duties for him. He was only passing through and had no specific request, just wanted to see a good friend he had missed.

Putnam made his usual preparations and went to ensure that everything was in order with the contractor, who happened to be the mayor of the city. The mayor confirmed some of the rumors surrounding the werebison. Putnam and the mayor reached an agreement: half of the payment would be given upfront, with the other half to be paid upon completion. There was also an additional bonus promised if Putnam could cure the bisontropy and bring the criminal back alive to face his sentence.

Putnam set out at dusk, taking the opportunity before his departure to question the hunters and mercenaries who had encountered the werebison. Despite his knowledge of werebisons, he had never faced one before and desired a precise understanding of their combat patterns and behavior. Listening attentively to their stories, he extracted valuable information while disregarding irrelevant details. Two crucial points stood out: the werebison was slower than a werewolf but faster than a werebear, and it possessed greater strength than a werebear but less than a werepig, making it in behavior, similar to a werebull. In essence, it presented a formidable challenge among the therianthropes he had encountered during his career as a witcher.

It took some time for Putnam to find a trail of the werebison, not because the therianthrope was stealthy, but due to the sheer number of killings it had committed. The body count was extensive, and the corpses were scattered in such a way, with blood splattered in different directions, that he momentarily lost track. He didn't know which way to go to find it, as if the monster had intentionally done it to confuse its pursuers and instill fear in them. It was only after conducting a more thorough examination of the victims' remains and determining the most recent one that he found a reliable trail to follow. He discovered the werebison near a clearing, grazing, seemingly in the form of a regular bison. However, Putnam knew it was him, as it matched the descriptions given by those who had attempted to hunt it down and survived its attacks. Additionally, his medallion vibrated, providing the customary warning.

So, without hesitation, Putnam drew his silver sword, applied his superior cursed oil, and prepared for the battle as he approached. The ensuing fight was brutal, a

clash of forces that could only be compared to Putnam's encounter with the Idr in Lyria. The battle extended beyond the clearing and continued through the forest in a dynamic of predator and prey, shifting back and forth. After several hours of combat, in the early hours of the morning, Putnam finally managed to defeat the werebison, albeit not without stumbling and spraining his ankle at the last moment due to a lapse in his reflexes caused by accumulated fatigue. This, combined with his battle wounds and the side effects of the witcher's potions he had consumed (as he didn't have time to take Swallow to counteract them), caused him to collapse unconscious, completely drained.

It was unknowingly at that point that Putnam's story with Alanna would truly begin, as she would find him, take him in, and ultimately care for him.

Alanna, unlike the other women who had passed through the witcher's life, was a simple woman with a rich inner world, but not tumultuous. She was a haven of peace amidst the chaos and misery that Putnam had witnessed and experienced in his life. A young girl, 18 years old, with red hair (something that Putnam liked it), who knew very little about the outside world. That doesn't mean she was ignorant, far from it. She wasn't a savage; she had been raised differently and possessed different knowledge from the common scholar. And Alanna's early life was, to say the least, curious.

Alanna was the daughter of an exiled flaminika from the Kovir Druids Circle, in fact, Alanna's mother was the flaminika who preceded Braith. Her exile had occurred long before the School of the Griffin sought their assistance in resuming their activities. Alanna's mother belonged to a more radical faction within the circle, one that did not consider the creatures brought by the First Conjunction of the Spheres as "monsters," but rather as beings deserving of life. They believed that sooner or later, these creatures would find their place in the ecological niche. If the Conjunction had occurred as just another phenomenon in the world, it meant that it had to serve some purpose. These thoughts ultimately led to her exile, along with several others who supported her.

However, the mother of the woman who would later be known as Alanna Pitch made a conscious decision not to form her own Druid Circle but instead allowed the exiles to find their own paths with many of them ended up in Mayena and other similar circles. This act of non-interference would have significant implications for the events that would unfold in the future. Since, while traveling alone, tragedy struck when she was assaulted by a former student of Ban Ard,

who had now become a knight-errant, resulting in her being subjected to a horrific act of rape. Unbeknownst to her at the time, this man would later be revealed as Alanna's father.

After the assault, the mother attempted to continue her journey, but the symptoms of pregnancy and the sexually transmitted disease she had contracted proved to be insurmountable obstacles. Despite her best efforts, she was unable to find a cure using her own skills. It was then that she made the difficult decision to settle in the very forest where Putnam had found himself on that night. It was there that she would give birth to her daughter and raise her in the seclusion of the forest.

The disease, relentless in its progression, slowly ravaged the mother's health, and tragically claimed her life when Alanna was just 13 years old. From that point onward, Alanna lived a solitary existence, isolated from the outside world, guided only by the teachings and cautionary tales her mother had imparted. With Putnam unknowingly becoming Alanna's first significant encounter with the outside world.

The initial interactions between Alanna and Putnam, once the witcher regained consciousness, were filled with tension and complexity. While Alanna had indeed saved him and provided care, her motivations were rooted in the profound loneliness she had endured during her five years of isolation. The teachings passed down by her mother had instilled deep-seated prejudices against knight-errants and witches, and Putnam, being a witcher from the School of the Griffin, embodied both of these perceived threats in a single entity, so to speak.

As Putnam awoke, he found himself within the confines of Alanna's home, a remarkable dwelling nestled within the hollowed interior of a towering tree. The dwelling had been transformed into a comfortable abode, displaying Alanna's skill and connection with nature. However, the harmony of the setting was juxtaposed by the immobilizing enchantment of entwined branches that held Putnam captive. Alanna had cast this spell out of a genuine fear that he might pose a danger to her or the precious forest she held dear.

In these early moments, emotions ran high, and the air was thick with suspicion and apprehension. Putnam, restrained by the magical bonds and plagued by his own wounded pride, struggled to navigate the delicate balance between gratitude for Alanna's care and the lingering bitterness of prejudice that he still had against druids due to Braith's abuse. Alanna, in turn, grappled with

conflicting sentiments of compassion and wariness, torn between the desire for connection and the ingrained caution that had been imparted to her.

As the days turned into weeks, given that it would take Putnam approximately three weeks to fully recover from his broken ankle due to his witcher condition, the connection between Alanna and Putnam deepened. They spent their time together exploring the forest, sharing stories, and gradually unraveling the layers of their souls. The initial prejudices that once stood between them began to crumble, making way for understanding and acceptance.

Alanna's release of Putnam from his captivity was a symbolic gesture of trust and a recognition of their growing bond. She assisted him with his physiological needs, offering her support and care as he navigated through the forest with his injured ankle as their interactions became more and more intimate.

Alanna, secluded for years, craved human connection. The nurse's syndrome, a phenomenon often experienced by caretakers, amplified her affection for Putnam. His charisma, combined with his physical attractiveness, drew her closer. Furthermore, his ability to spark her curiosity about the outside world and the sense of wonder he awakened within her caused her to rapidly fall in love.

For Putnam, Alanna's innocence, naivety, and curiosity were a breath of fresh air. They reminded him of a time before the weight of his profession cast its shadow upon him and burdened him with the traumas he had endured. Her genuine interest in the world and her unjaded perspective offered him a glimmer of hope and a ray of light amidst the darkness of his tumultuous existence. Furthermore, Putnam, due to this mental wounds he carried, could be considered a "lovebird" in search of a connection akin to the one he had once shared with Tubiel. Since her death, he had not experienced anything similar, with only Marina and Jolanta coming extremely close to filling that void.

And so, without realizing it, both of them fell deeply in love with each other during those three weeks when the witcher was being cared for by the secluded druid until Putnam had fully recovered, and their love was consummated at the end of that November. Each passing day brought them closer, their hearts intertwining in a dance of affection and desire. The barriers that once held them apart crumbled under the weight of their undeniable connection.

However, Putnam's cautious nature and the weight of his past experiences weighed heavily on his decision-making. He feared that his presence would only

bring danger and turmoil into Alanna's life, just as it had with Marina and Jolanta. Despite the intensity of his feelings, he believed it would be best to leave, sparing her from the potential hardships that came with being involved, not only with a witcher but with someone like him.

That fateful night, after their first passionate encounter, Putnam prepared himself to depart. He gathered his belongings, his mind torn between the love he had found and The Path that called him. Time seemed to slip through his fingers, and he knew he had to act swiftly if he wanted to reach Kaer Seren before the harsh kovirian winter arrived.

As dawn approached, Putnam made his way towards the edge of the forest, his heart heavy with conflicting emotions. But fate had a different plan in store for him. Alanna, awakened by the absence of his warmth, followed him silently, her eyes filled with a mixture of pain and sorrow. Without uttering a single word, her gaze spoke volumes, pleading for him to stay.

In that poignant moment, Putnam felt the weight of the shattered and lonely hearts he had left behind. And in Alanna's eyes, he saw the reflection of all those women who had awakened to an empty void where his presence had once been. It was a stark reminder of the pain he had caused and the sadness he had left in his wake. It served as a turning point, a moment when the lesson Ciri had taught him by abandoning him with a letter came back to him, taking effect. It was a realization that he couldn't continue down the same path, leaving a trail of broken hearts in his wake.

This realization would be evident in his future relationships, both new ones and those from the past that resurfaced, with Jolanta the following year being particularly notable. However, as in life, there would be moments of progress and setbacks in his ongoing struggle to find happiness and inner peace. Nevertheless, those days marked a significant step forward for Putnam. Even if he faced setbacks on his path to healing once again, they wouldn't bring him back to square one. Instead, they would serve as reminders to keep looking ahead and striving for a better future.

Winter in the Woods & Marriage to Alanna

The winter that Putnam spent with Alanna, if it needs to be classified in any way, was akin to the winter that never occurred with Marina due to Putnam's involvement in Fabio Sachs' expedition to the Far East, albeit colder due to the forest's northern location.

During their time together, Putnam and Alanna's relationship blossomed and deepened, surpassing the pace of a typical romance. This rapid progression was fueled by Alanna's profound loneliness, which she concealed in front of Putnam to appear strong. However, Putnam welcomed their connection wholeheartedly, finding solace and joy in Alanna's presence and the enchanting winter atmosphere of the forest. He eagerly shared his knowledge of the outside world, recounting tales of Brokilon, Novigrad, and other places, while also imparting practical skills like sword training that would shape Alanna's future.

Amidst their deepening bond, Alanna insisted that they formalize their commitment through a Druidic ritual. Though there was no official circle present to conduct the ceremony in the customary manner, they found a unique way to pledge their love and unity. However, their union, like a shooting star, burned brightly but was suddenly extinguished. The flame of their love flickered out when Alanna discovered that witchers were infertile, dashing her hopes of having children with Putnam. Faced with this heartbreak realization, Alanna made the painful decision to leave her husband behind and embark on a personal journey to explore the wider world outside her forest sanctuary, driven by Putnam's stories and yearning for a life she had longed for during her years of solitude.

Although he initially didn't admit it, Putnam was deeply hurt by Alanna's abandonment. He found himself teetering on the edge, tempted to fall back into old patterns and seek solace in the arms of other women. It seemed as though all the effort he had invested in their relationship and the remorse he had felt for his emotional turmoil over the past five years had been in vain.

However, fortunately, he resisted the temptation. As mentioned before, although he experienced a setback in his healing process, he had learned from his past mistakes. Instead of seeking solace in other women, he decided to channel his pain by taking contracts to hunt down the monsters that roamed Kovir. Most of these contracts were very dangerous, but they served as a way for him to distract himself from his emotional pain, replacing it with the adrenaline of combat and the physical pain after. It wasn't the healthiest way to cope with his pain, but it was better than seeking temporary substitutes that would lead to nothing meaningful.

He was consumed by the depth of his emotions and overwhelming remorse, leading him to pen numerous letters to Jolanta, desperately seeking her forgiveness for the pain he had caused and expressing profound regret for his

inability to trust in their potential for growth and overcoming challenges together. Each heartfelt word was an attempt to reconcile the past and salvage what was left of their connection. However, Jolanta never had the chance to read those letters, at least not until a considerable amount of time had passed. As days turned into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years, her mailbox remained untouched, gradually accumulating an abundance of unread letters from Putnam. Each word served as an echo of his heartfelt plea for reconciliation, a constant reminder of the love they had lost. It was a cruel twist of fate that kept their paths apart.

Expedition to the Far North (1286 - 1288)

What became of Fabio during that time? Well, Fabio returned to Erin, started a family (with his first daughter being born around that time), and dedicated himself to academic work. He published several books about his journeys to the Far East, thereby introducing the region of Bia Thin to the Nordlings. His works earned him fame and prestige, particularly among various Nordling scholars (and even a few Nilfgaardians). Not to mention the fact that he had kept his promise to Meve and brought prosperity to Lyria & Rivia through the trade treaties the expedition had secured.

However, over time, that life started to bore him, and his desire to travel and explore the world grew stronger. He couldn't confine himself to one place. He needed to traverse the far reaches of the Continent and delve into its intricacies. There was so much to discover, so much to learn, and the risks were worth taking. For a while, he pondered which direction to take but couldn't decide. Should he head south? Beyond Ofir? Towards the land of Apumayu, spoken of by Zangvebarian merchants? The heat was already too much for him to endure. What about the west? It posed challenges, and although he had theories about what lay there, it would require significant resources that his wealth from the first expedition unfortunately did not cover. Should he return to the East? That would be repetitive. However, the Okami Islands he had heard of in the Tuyotuki Islands intrigued him, as did the prospect of exploring the Sundalaic Islands in depth.

And so, he deliberated for several months until one day, while conversing with acquaintances and strolling with his first daughter, recounting the creatures he had encountered during his expedition to the Far East, he stumbled upon the key to his next destination. One of his acquaintances mentioned the white dragons

and other creatures from that region, as well as mammoths and legends associated with the area. The Far North became clear to him. That part of the world was shrouded in the mists of the unknown, much like the Far East had been years ago. Undoubtedly, it was the perfect place to explore and uncover its mysteries.

The financing of this new expedition posed no problem, as Fabio's fame and prestige had spread far and wide. Monarchs, in a manner of speaking, competed for his services, offering increasingly attractive conditions and substantial sums of money to replicate the prosperity he had brought to Lyria & Rivia in their own kingdoms. Eventually, Fabio accepted the offer from Kovir, enticed by the logistical advantages of departing from that kingdom to venture into the Far North, as well as the generous funding, abundant resources, and favorable terms that accompanied it.

Afterward, the only remaining task was to gather the people for the expedition, which proved not to be difficult either. Many of those who had survived the previous expedition to the Far East joined once again, including Istredd, Eberhatt, and, of course, Putnam. Although locating the witcher proved challenging due to the nature of his profession, they eventually found him in the city of Thwyth after his fame spread for successfully defeating a terrifying Vendigo that had been terrorizing the locals and travelers passing through (legends say that with the help of the legendary Geralt of Rivia, but this is unclear) Putnam immediately accepted the offer, driven not only by the debt he felt towards Fabio for saving his life and being his friend but also because, his mental health and much like in late 1281 (albeit to a greater extent), he felt the need to break out of his comfort zone.

Regarding new members in this expedition, there were several interesting additions. One notable member was Jabolet, a mage and a mutual friend of Istredd and Triss. He was suggested by Triss after she declined Fabio's offer to join the expedition. During the journey, Jabolet formed a friendship with Putnam (and later with Jolanta, once he met her in Vinland). Eventually, Jabolet became the mage of the School of the Crane, providing unique characteristics to these witches through his study and experimentation with mutagens specific to the terrains in which they would combat monsters. This included things like enhanced resistance to underwater pressure and a improved effectiveness in utilizing the Killer Whale potion, in case they didn't use the habitual diving suits. Other notable members (though not as much as Jabolet) were Tugdual and

Democritus of Ban Ard, two sorcerers, Bosco of Cidaris, a historian and linguist who was a friend of Jabolet and joined the expedition at his invitation, and finally, Kina of Aedirn, a mercenary recommended by Putnam's mercenary friend, Brynn, after she herself couldn't join due to personal matters.

And finally, after organizing and gathering everything necessary, the expedition to the Far North set off from Kovir at the end of March that year, embarking on a journey to unravel the mysteries of this remote part of the world. Their first destination, serving as a starting point before delving deeper into the unknown, was the [Duchy of Vinland](#), the sole relatively well-known location in that region at the time by nordlings.

The Amikuks Hunt of Vinland / The reencounter with Jolanta (Summer, 1286)

“Ah, that medallion! It reminds me of the one worn by the companion of a mage who saved me many years ago. Her name was Cedda, as beautiful as a summer sunset. And the companion’s name... Ryvon, if I remember correctly. Though my memory may occasionally falter, excuse me. I am Falmak, one of the two dukes of Vinland. So, what do you say? Would you be interested in joining my team, bicolored viedzmak?”

—Falmak, approaching Putnam at The Gray Snowball Inn in Hóp, capital of Vinland

This time, thanks to the experience gained from their previous expedition and a stroke of luck, the journey began much more smoothly, and they arrived in Vinland in just three months, a significant reduction from the estimated five months. They saved considerable time by traveling in a drakkar alongside Skellige traders they encountered along the way, who happened to be heading towards Vinland as well.

Their objective in Vinland was twofold. First, to gather information about the area and verify the legends that reached the Northern Kingdoms with reality. Second, and more importantly, to secure a trade treaty with the duchy that would benefit Kovir. However, what seemed like a straightforward task became more complicated upon their arrival.

When they reached the capital, Hóp, they didn't know where to begin. They visited the former communal house, which had been transformed into the ducal palace, only to be told that the dukes were not

present and had gone out. In search of information, they headed to the nearest tavern called "The Grey Snowball," unaware that they would find more than they had ever anticipated. Especially for Putnam, as his past would come crashing back to him with full force once he set foot in that place.

The tavern itself was enormous, almost resembling a second "communal house," so to speak. It surpassed in size any other in the Northern Kingdoms, including those in Kovir. It boasted a hybrid architectural style, displaying a noticeable Skræling influence.

Upon entering, they were taken aback not only by its size but also by the bustling crowd and lively atmosphere. It was evident that something significant was happening, although they remained uncertain of the specifics. They secured a secluded table, ordered some food, and observed the scene, trying to gather more information. It wasn't until an elderly man, recognizing Putnam as a witcher, approached them that they finally discovered the nature of the event. This man was none other than Falmak, one of the two dukes who governed that diarchy—the most remote "Nordling" territory.

It turned out they had arrived in the midst of a severe political and social crisis. A plague of amikuks was ravaging the duchy, devastating crops, and attacking people. No one had been able to put an end to this plague, which created tensions between factions with a more Nordling mindset and those who did not share it. The Nordling faction accused the Skræling tribes of being responsible for the plague, fueled by the discrimination that the tribals still faced. Some within this faction even proposed exterminating the Skrælings as a solution to the problem. Despite the closure of mines and the blocking of other underground locations, these monsters continued to appear. On the other hand, the opposing faction argued that it was not the case and that they suffered from these monsters just as much. This faction also advocated for the promotion of cultural blending and syncretism with the Skræling tribes. In fact, Falmak had a Skræling wife and six sons of mixed heritage.

These two factions were represented by the dukes

Vagvul, the younger duke who led the more Nordling-minded faction, and the elder Falmak, the leader of the other faction. Tensions had reached such a point that, had it not been for an agreement reached between the dukes, a civil war would have erupted. This agreement was based on an ancient tradition from the early days of Vinland, which involved a hunting tournament that would traverse

the entire country, in this case, to exterminate the amikuks. The rules of the tournament were simple: whoever accumulated the most amikuk heads would be declared the winner. Cheating was not allowed, as any team caught doing so would be exiled from the duchy.

However, Valgvul, upon accepting this agreement, set a condition for Falmak. The condition was that the winner of the hunt would be chosen as the sole duke of Vinland, with the other duke relinquishing their title, granting the victor absolute power and the freedom to govern as they wished. If the amikuk problem persisted even after the hunting tournament, the winner would have the opportunity to prove their method of eradicating the plague without opposition.

On that day, it seemed that all the teams had gathered there to finalize preparations before the tournament began. If they hadn't done so in a separate location, it was to provide everyone with the opportunity to switch teams if they wished, regardless of their reasons.

It turned out that Falmak had approached
Putnam almost immediately, not only

because the medallion with the eagle head evoked memories, but for a simple reason. The rival young duke's team had a significant advantage, and Falmak was deeply concerned until Putnam appeared as if he were a gift from Wotan himself. This advantage came in the form of a witcher, or rather, a witcheress of Redanian origin, as indicated by her accent. Falmak had tried to convince the witcheress to join his side, but he had been unsuccessful. This piqued Putnam's interest and the curiosity of the other expedition members due to the rarity of female witches. Putnam, in that moment, thought to himself that he knew few witcheresses of Redanian origin, or rather, he could say he knew only one, never suspecting who it might be, it would be a coincidence if it was her. Life had surprised him, both for better and for worse, so he was prepared for anything.

Falmak explained that he feared Valgvul would win with the witcheress on his side and carry out his plans. That's why he had immediately turned to Putnam upon seeing him, desperate to balance the scales. Although Falmak had allowed the presence of additional teams, who would effectively act as puppets for the orders of one of the two dukes (depending on which side they supported), he feared that neither his team nor his allied teams would win with Valgvul having the witcheress on his side.

It was then, shortly after, that the great revelation occurred, and Putnam would once again come face to face with his past (and at that time, unbeknownst to him, his future). It was a gradual realization, slowly emerging through his various senses. First, he detected a scent among the people in the tavern, a fragrance of aromatic plants attempting to mask the smell of blood but failing to do so, at least not for a witcher's sense of smell. He recognized it and had an inkling of who it could be but dismissed the thought. No, it was impossible for Jolanta to be there.

Next, he heard a Redanian accent, a high-pitched voice of either a woman or a man; he couldn't differentiate at that moment, subtly marked by the accent. Someone entered the tavern—could it be her? No, it couldn't be, so he dismissed the thought again, thinking he was simply becoming paranoid. But it was his sight that ultimately confirmed his suspicion. No, he wasn't mistaken. It was indeed Jolanta who was there. Five years had passed, and he never thought he would see her again after abandoning her with a letter all those years ago. In that moment, he felt a surge of shame as he remembered the more recent letters he had written and sent in less than ideal states, asking her for forgiveness. That explained why there had been no response. She was just as beautiful, although more tired, a clear sign that she had been through a lot. He wondered what had happened to her. He also fervently wished that their gazes wouldn't meet, but Jolanta had also recognized him the moment she entered, casting him a glance filled with all the terrible emotions that the witcher had evoked through his abandonment. It was a glance that Putnam would never forget, leaving him absorbed in his thoughts while the rest of the expedition members continued negotiating with Falmak about joining the team for the hunt.

In the end, they reached an agreement. They would join in exchange for Falmak signing an exclusive trade agreement, ensuring that only Kovir would receive Vinland's products. However, it was ultimately Putnam who had the final say. After all, he was the witcher. It wasn't until Fabio nudged him that he snapped out of his trance and agreed. Not because of what they had signed but because it provided him with another chance to speak with Jolanta and, hopefully, resolve things.

What Putnam didn't know at that moment was that Jolanta's reasons for being in Vinland were not related to the hunting tournament. Frankly speaking, she couldn't care less about it. Her true motive was to assassinate Valgvul for

unjustly condemning Pardus to the gallows during his time in Vinland. Pardus had saved a couple of Skraeling women from being violated, and Jolanta sought justice for his wrongful punishment. Patiently, she waited for the opportune moment, using seduction as a strategy to lower Valgvul's guard, and ultimately, take his life.

The Teams for the Amikuks Hunt / The Hunting Competition / Back with Jolanta

“It's not that I don't care about you, because I do, Jolanta. But Fabio saved my life. Without him, we would never have met. And I don't want to break up with you, but I know you, and I know you would not accept to join the expedition. As much as it hurts me to say this, our paths should diverge for now. I owe this to Fabio, and I cannot turn my back on him.”

—Putnam to Jolanta during their breakup in Vinland

The teams for the amikuk hunting competition consisted of a total of six teams, each led by one of the dukes or a prominent member of the local nobility.

Putnam, Fabio, and the rest of the expedition, as mentioned earlier, joined Duke Falmak's team. This team also included several experienced hunters and skilled warriors, such as Falmak's own bastard daughter, the renowned Lady Knight Sioni.

The other major team in the competition was led by Duke Vagvul, who had recently inherited the position from his father, Lestec. Vagvul's team was known for its aggressive hunting tactics, and he was determined to win the competition to solidify his rule over the duchy. The team comprised experienced warriors, many of whom had served in Vagvul's personal guard. Jolanta, being the only woman on the team, had been included due to her status as a witcheress and Vagvul's infatuation with her.

As a curious note, Putnam's immediate dislike of Vagvul was fueled not only by the duke's racism but also by his arrogance, pomposity, and overall foolishness. Vagvul's slimy behavior towards Jolanta only added fuel to Putnam's anger and frustration. His constant attempts to impress Jolanta with empty words and false charm further irritated Putnam. While he respected Jolanta's autonomy and understood that it was her choice whether to entertain Vagvul's advances or not, Putnam struggled to contain his urge to confront the arrogant duke.

Driven by a mixture of protectiveness, jealousy, and frustration, Putnam finally succumbed to his instincts and challenged Vagvul to an einvígi. The clash between the two men was fierce, with Putnam's skill and anger propelling him

forward. In a swift and decisive moment, Putnam's fist connected with Vagvul's nose, breaking it and leaving the arrogant duke reeling in pain.

Throughout the ordeal, Fabio and Istredd attempted to calm Putnam, serving as his voice of reason and trying to dissuade him from engaging in a physical confrontation. They managed to calm him down on several occasions, but their efforts were ultimately futile in preventing Putnam from challenging Vagvul. His deep-rooted protectiveness over Jolanta and his disdain for Vagvul's slimy behavior overpowered any rational thoughts that urged him to restrain himself.

Jolanta's thoughts after that ranged from "just men being men" to the belief that the young duke deserved to have his nose broken. Ironically, thanks to Putnam, she saw an opportunity to get even more closer to the duke and exact her revenge for what he had done to Pardus.

The third team was a knightly order led by Limmdetr Jarumson, a minor noble and the son of one of the jarls who ruled over one of the provinces within the duchy, specifically the northernmost one. He had recently returned from the region known as [Gotland](#), as called by the Vinlandi, where he had attempted to convert the tribals to the faith of Tyr Svetovit alongside his men, but their crusade had failed. It would be the first time the expedition heard of that region upon meeting them, and after that they planned to depart for Gotland once they finished their stay in the duchy. As expected, Limmdetr supported Vagvul.

The fourth team was comprised of a group of merchants and mercenaries from the region known as [Kvenland](#) by the Vinlandi. These individuals had been friends with Falmak for several years, and their decision to join the tournament had a simple motivation: they wanted to abolish the excessive taxes imposed on them based solely on their ethnicity when conducting trade. If they emerged as the winners, their goal was to eliminate all the racist laws enforced by Vagvul, laws that Falmak had been unable to repeal due to the limitations of his governing power in the diarchy. It was through their encounter with the expedition that the group learned about the region, and they discussed the possibility of including a visit to Kvenland in their plans, depending on the final route they chose after the conclusion of the tournament.

The fifth team was known as The Collectors of Spirits, or "Wakinyan Cikala" in the Skraelings' Common Language used in Vinland. It was comprised of skilled warriors from various Skraeling clans. They were led by Brem, a mixed Skelliger / Skraeling noble who served as both a rival to Vagvul and an ally of Falmak. Brem

possessed a profound understanding and respect for the ancient traditions and beliefs of his people, vehemently opposing Vagvul's discriminatory policies targeting both mixed and pure Skraeling populations. To Brem, the amikuk hunting competition provided an opportunity to showcase the strength and skills of his people while paying homage to the spirits of the hunted amikuks.

The team consisted of approximately 30 highly skilled warriors carefully selected for their exceptional hunting abilities and deep spiritual connection to the land. They were equipped with traditional weapons and were renowned for their stealthy and respectful hunting tactics. Initially hesitant to participate in the competition, Brem was eventually persuaded by his ally Falmak, who recognized the chance to enhance their prospects of victory and ultimately strip Vagvul of his power.

The last team consisted of a group of raiders from the region known as Heluland by the Vinlandi. Just like with the other teams, upon meeting them, the expedition learned about a new region and considered the possibility of passing through there once they had a more detailed route planned, rather than just an idea. These raiders had joined the tournament in support of Vagvul, as the young duke had promised them that if he or any of his allied teams emerged victorious, Heluland would be annexed to Vinland, granting them better living conditions and enabling them to retire from their raiding lifestyle.

And after joining Falmak's team, it would be two days later that the competition and their journey throughout Vinland would begin. The expedition was granted a day of rest as a courtesy for being the last to "arrive." Initially, the expedition believed that the journey for the tournament would be relative short, but it turned out to be longer than expected. The Duchy of Far North proved to be larger in size than Toussaint. It may not have been as beautiful as the duchy in the Nilfgaardian Empire, but it had its own charm. Personally, Putnam found it more appealing, despite the Kaedweni-like climate, albeit somewhat colder (and he preferred milder climates like Cidaris or Ebbing). Jolanta also appreciated the colder climate, as she was more accustomed to it than the heat. What bothered her the most was Vagvul, but she believed she would soon take care of that, or at least that's what she thought in that moment.

The initial days were challenging for Falmak's team, and they fell significantly behind the other teams. Jolanta, who had been in the duchy longer than Putnam, took the lead by successfully killing several amikuks, allowing Vagvul's team to maintain their first position, at least for the time being. The same

applied to other teams, including Limmdetr's knightly order, whose experience in dealing with monsters during their failed crusade in Gotland gave them an advantage. During this period, Putnam was fortunate enough to eliminate one or two amikuks while sustaining minor injuries. However, he quickly learned from his mistakes, delving deep into the study of this monsters and refining his skills. By the end of the first week of the tournament, Falmak's team managed to secure the second position, trailing closely behind Vagvul's team. It's worth noting that Istredd's role as the team's healer and Eberhatt's more disciplined utilization of his lycanthropy also played a significant part in their progress.

The initial interactions during the tournament between Jolanta and Putnam were complicated and, above all, tense. Although they didn't want to engage with each other, they were forced to do so whenever the different teams crossed paths and compared the number of amikuks that they had hunted. They tried to maintain a professional demeanor, but their shared past weighed heavily on them, making it nearly impossible. Jolanta, with her cutting wit, couldn't resist making sarcastic remarks whenever Putnam spoke, reminding him not only of their shared past but also referencing the witcher's emotionally turbulent life. Since Jolanta had crossed paths with Trill and even visited Marina's tavern in early 1282 when Putnam was still the talk of the regular patrons. Her encounter with Marina left her conflicted about what she thought of Putnam. Putnam, on the other hand, attempted to brush off these comments or justify himself but eventually gave up following Istredd's advice. In the words of the multifaceted mage, "With women like Jolanta or Yennefer, it's not worth arguing because you'll end up losing most of the time, believe me."

Her encounter with Trill, prior to visiting Marina's tavern, left her unaffected. The fact that Putnam had left another woman with a letter didn't surprise her at all. It was her visit to Marina's tavern that left her conflicted about what she thought of the so-called "Golden Griffin." It's worth mentioning that as soon as Marina's regular customers recognized Jolanta as a witcheress and began talking not only about Freyja but also about Putnam, who had been the most recent topic of interest, Jolanta was on the verge of leaving. She wasn't particularly interested in hearing about her ex. But in the end, curiosity and the inclement weather outside got the better of her. While waiting for her meal and during her meal, she attentively listened to the stories that customers shared about Putnam. Some of the tales seemed like typical behavior that Putnam would engage in, while others pleasantly surprised her. This led Jolanta to engage in conversation with the non-humans present at the Red Crow, posing as Putnam's "sister-in-law,"

which, at some point, had been the truth.

Eventually, the customers caught Marina's attention and informed her that a relative of Putnam was present, in case she wanted to say anything if they were to meet before during his return to the Red Crow from the Far East. This led the two women to meet and converse. Jolanta couldn't help but feel a twinge of jealousy regarding the treatment and relationship that Marina and Putnam had had. At the same time, she was surprised, as she wasn't mistaken about the good man she had seen in Putnam beneath the layers of pain that the witcher carried and refused to let go of. It's worth mentioning that what surprised her the most was the healthy breakup they had, without letters or stupid bags of coins as if she were a whore from the Passiflora. Perhaps he had changed, or perhaps not. Maybe he had only done so out of guilt for abandoning her. But her encounter with Marina couldn't help but leave her with those conflicting feelings about him.

On Putnam's part, despite claiming to have moved on from Jolanta, it wasn't the case. And acts like breaking Vagvul's nose, said more than his words, no matter how much he justified himself by saying that he had done it because he was an asshole and needed a lesson, which was only a half-truth. Besides, Putnam was a terrible liar. And anyone could tell that. But Jolanta and Fabio more than anyone else.

It wouldn't be until the passing weeks, reaching the end of July 1286, that the tensions between the former couple started to ease, and gradually, the remaining embers of their relationship would reignite the fire. From Jolanta's perspective, it was due to the changes she had observed in Putnam – his willingness to accept help and not bear the weight of the world on his shoulders alone. Although he still had that tendency, it had diminished. She could perceive it in the way he expressed himself, his mannerisms, and how he approached his teammates to form a team when he felt overwhelmed.

Even at night, when Putnam would wake up from his nightmares, their camps being separated by a certain distance (this was the case when they couldn't stay in cities or villages), his heightened senses allowed him to overhear Putnam's conversations in the early hours of the morning, whether it was with Fabio, Eberhatt, or Istredd. These conversations piqued Jolanta's curiosity as she listened to how the witcher opened up completely to them without feeling guilty. On the contrary, he welcomed their advice and made an effort to apply it. It was something she wished he had done when they were together.

In addition to these factors, Jolanta was also grappling with the death of her adoptive father, which she was struggling to cope with. She had also experienced the deaths of several members from the School of the Cat close to her, who were killed by bounty hunters. Along with the failures in her various relationships, both of before and after meeting Putnam. The abandonment by Vargos, the rejection by her teenage love, Joël, after attempting to rekindle their relationship only to be used for a one-night stand, the misguided ideals of Nokta, the unfulfilled promises to the farmer who saved her life, the lies of the sorceress Biruta Anna Marquette Icartim, who only wanted to experiment on her and turn her into a worse abomination than Kiyan, and even the betrayal of a young jeweler from Kerack, who, after pledging a life together, betrayed her in exchange for the aforementioned still active bounty placed on the members of the School of the Cat by the Nilfgaardian soldiers after they had taken the caravan. All of this weighed heavily on the shoulders of the back then Cat witcheress.

Putnam's case was somewhat similar, as mentioned before, but more focused on fear rather than disillusionment (as was Jolanta's situation). He feared losing any of the women he came to love in a tragic way again. D'yaebł was the final straw after what happened with Tubiel and Nabla.

But it wouldn't be until they arrived in the city of Leifsbuðir, famous for its hot springs, halfway through the tournament journey, to rest for a few days after traveling a long distance without seeing any civilization, that they would truly be together again. And it all happened because of something as simple as a romp in the hay. At that point in the tournament, the raiders of Heluland were leading the competition, boasting the highest number of amikuks hunted.

The initiative would be taken by Jolanta, who, tired of her loneliness and Vagvul (whom she was on the verge of killing, but there was always something that interrupted the potential murder), sought out Putnam (although initially with the intention of a quick fling). She asked the locals for his whereabouts and headed to the hot springs. There, she found him, along with a couple of monkeys that occasionally used the hot springs and had become friends with Putnam (he had even given names to the monkeys), as well as his dog Frey. It was a comical scene, but Jolanta wasn't in the mood to play along with the animals. So she shooed them away, including Frey, who tried to give her puppy eyes but failed to convince Jolanta. Putnam for his part remained a silent observer, but with a amusing smile in his face, his gaze filled with a mix of fascination and tenderness

as Jolanta undressed, revealing the new scars adorning her body.

Shortly after what happened in the hot springs, Jolanta and Putnam found themselves drawn to each other again and again. What started as a quick fling soon turned into a series of passionate encounters. They couldn't resist the magnetic pull that brought them together, despite the risks and limitations imposed by the tournament.

In the secrecy of their meetings, Jolanta and Putnam not only indulged in their physical desires but also engaged in deep conversations about their lives, hopes, and shared past. It was in these stolen moments that they rediscovered the connection they had once shared and realized that something precious from their history had remained intact.

Both Jolanta and Putnam had endured their fair share of hardships and heartbreak. Putnam, haunted by the tragic deaths of the women he had loved before, found solace and healing in the presence of Jolanta once again. Being with her helped him overcome the fear that had consumed him for so long, allowing him to embrace their renewed connection without reservation.

For Jolanta, these clandestine meetings provided a much-needed escape from the burdens and disappointments she had faced. She had become disillusioned with her search for connections and had come dangerously close to losing herself in the cold and calculated ways of a significant part of the School of the Cat. But being with Putnam rekindled her excitement and reminded her of the warmth and compassion she had once possessed.

Unfortunately, although time seemed to stand still when they were together, it was only a perception, and the tournament continued with each of them giving their best for their teams. The attitude of Putnam and Jolanta, since their quick fling at the city's hot springs, shifted from tense to sportsmanlike. This surprised everyone who had endured the tensions of the now-rekindled couple throughout the tournament, but no one said anything because deep down, they were grateful that the drama had subsided. The only one who suspected something was Fabio, who knew Putnam too well to easily sense that he and Jolanta were involved again. Putnam never denied it; he simply remained silent, as he enjoyed the secrecy of their renewed relationship. And he found it particularly amusing to come up with monster-related excuses to justify returning to the team with marks or disheveled clothing.

So, the weeks passed, and the tournament became a fiercely contested

competition, with the teams including Putnam and Jolanta vying for the top spot most of the time. It was so fiercely contested that even at the end, when the team of the old duke was declared the winner, Vagvul exclaimed that Falmak's team had cheated and falsified several amikuk heads (a nonsense accusation), denying the results and almost triggering the civil war that the tournament was supposed to prevent. However, Jolanta finally managed to take her revenge by causing Vagvul to slip and fall off a cliff, resulting in his death. Nobody suspected foul play, and it was regarded as an accident. And as expected, after Falmak's victory, the expedition secured its long-awaited trade treaty for Kovir, and they began making preparations to venture further north, gathering information from the locals about the unknown territories ahead.

The dilemma now, at least for Putnam, was deciding between two paths. During his time with Jolanta, they had once again discussed a life together. However, there was Fabio, his expeditions, and the sense of duty and loyalty Putnam felt towards his friend for saving his life and not letting him perish in the ruins of Magne as Tubiel had intended. He had sworn to himself that he would go to the ends of the earth for Fabio because of that act. But on the other hand, he longed to be with Jolanta again and live together in Novigrad, to make it up to her for abandoning her, as he deeply regretted his past actions. Jolanta had even promised him that she would surely find plenty of work cleaning monster-infested sewers (which was partially true) so he wouldn't have to worry about "living off her" as he did in 1281. The monster population in Novigrad's sewers had grown significantly, and they could live together there for a while, and then retire to a peaceful and secluded place with the money they earned, perhaps a farm or something similar.

It was a tempting offer, incredibly tempting. The life of peace and tranquility that he could never fully achieve with Tubiel (and had promised and failed Marina), was within his grasp once again. But in the end, he rejected it. He owed too much to Fabio and couldn't leave him alone in his quest to unravel the world's secrets and map Terra Incognita. However, there was a substantial change in his attitude this time, albeit small in appearance, that would be crucial for the future, both for him and for her. He didn't abandon her with a letter. He confronted her, and they broke up face to face. It was difficult for Putnam, as he dreaded seeing Jolanta's heart break again, but he felt it was necessary. Fear is often overcome by facing it, and so it was. Putnam was honest, and the breakup, although painful, was a healthy one. Even before leaving Vinland to venture further north with the rest of the expedition, Putnam became poetic and promised Jolanta

that when "*the sea stopped whispering his name*," they would be together again and would never part. Ironically, that poetic phrase would prove prophetic, as they wouldn't be reunited until almost the end of the 14th century, once the Silk Islands and the Western Continent had been discovered and colonization had begun. Specifically, on May 11, 1381, Putnam's 126th birthday, they would be together again. Life kept them separated for a long time due to various circumstances, despite their attempts to reunite once more.

Heluland, The Land of Flat Stones (Late Summer - Early Autumn of 1286)

"Heluland is a harsh land covered with huge flat stones that many of the local people believe are the ruins of an ancient civilization. The weather there is harsh, with howling winds and chilling temperatures, but it's a place of breathtaking natural beauty and untamed landscapes, where nature's power and majesty reign supreme."

—Istredd of Aedd Gynvael, An Updated Geography of The Continent (1289)

After getting everything ready and adding some locals who could be helpful to the expedition, Fabio and the rest of the expedition departed from Vinland in late summer, heading further north. Their objective was, in Fabio's words, "*To reach the northernmost end of the Continent.*" It could be said that they achieved this goal only partially. With the aid of these new additions, Fabio could start crafting a better map of the area (although with many errors that would need correction), and Putnam could prepare for the dangers that might lie ahead in terms of monsters. It was also thanks to these new members that they heard about another school of witchers, although they didn't know the exact animal motif, only that it was that of a bird.

Putnam pondered over what it could be. The School of the Hawk? The School of the Raven? He doubted it, but he didn't know many schools with bird motifs other than those and his own. Any other school was nothing more than myths from the 10th century, and who knew how much truth, error, or distortion lay in them. Eventually, they would come across one of these "myths," which turned out to be the School of the Owl, or rather what was left of it, as they would unintentionally stumble upon them due to the conditions they encountered throughout their journey.

For Jolanta's part, after the breakup, she spent some more time in Vinland, as the amikuk plague, while nearly eradicated, still posed some lingering problems with a few remaining specimens causing trouble. However, she eventually

returned to Novigrad, where she took on the responsibility of dismantling something as terrible as the worst of monsters: a network involved in pedophilia and child trafficking, which included high-ranking members of the Church of the Eternal Fire.

Although Jolanta's canonization would come much later in the future, it is believed that the first references to her as "Saint Jolanta" come from this time, even if only as a nickname used by the parents who managed to recover their children safe and sound thanks to her. According to Fabiolan legends, it is also said that the 1288 fire of the Great Temple of the Eternal Fire was caused by her as justice for what had been done to the children, but this remains uncertain.

But returning to the expedition, from Vinland, they traveled towards Heluland due to the presence of Skelliger population. They hoped these locals could help them navigate the region even better and guide them towards the farthest northern point possible. Thanks to the Vinlandi members added to the expedition, they had a general idea of what lay beyond the duchy, but it was still limited, and even the Vinlandi were unfamiliar with many things. Despite resolving many potential issues by including these locals, they still wanted to proceed with caution and not take unnecessary risks. The region was as dangerous as the Korath Desert, and the idea of dying in this cold, unforgiving part of the world was unpleasant for everyone.

Once in Heluland, the first things they encountered were the huge flat stones that gave the place its name and the harsh land that composed the area. It had its charm, but it couldn't hide the harshness of life there. When they found the first signs of civilization, it was in the form of a shepherd with his flock of sheep being attacked by a white dragon.

Upon seeing the shepherd under attack, Putnam didn't hesitate, even though it was practically suicide, and rushed to confront the monster. Eberhatt, who had learned to control his lycanthropy better, joined him, and what followed was a battle worthy of the legendary George of Kagen. It was a tough fight where Putnam put his mastery of Signs to the test. He came close to freezing to death due to the monster's icy breath and other deadly attacks. However, he applied the techniques that Adalwulf shared with him when they first met, about how to kill a wyvern, and what Keldar taught him in case he fought "a better-equipped" enemy. These techniques helped him survive the encounter with the white dragon, along with Eberhatt's assistance, who, in his lycanthropic form,

distracted and weakened the dragon enough for Putnam to deliver the killing blow.

The battle left Putnam in need of medical assistance, but it could have been much worse without Eberhatt's help. They were fortunate that the Skelliger shepherd, whose life they saved, offered them aid by taking them to his settlement, sparing their own resources. During the battle, Istredd and Jabolet played a crucial role by creating a magical barrier to protect the shepherd, his flock of sheep, and the rest of the expedition from the dragon's freezing breath.

Heluland, as such, was not a unified state like Vinland. The harsh climatic conditions allowed for settlements led by various clans, but did not foster the cohesion needed to form a centralized country. Due to the scarcity of resources, these clans often engaged in constant wars, raiding each other, and other territories when they travel across the [Great Lake](#). However, during that time, a common threat emerged, uniting them all and putting an end to their internal conflicts, at least temporarily. This threat turned out to be none other than a group of vampires from the Tdet tribe, who had found easy prey in the humans of Heluland.

More Blood For The Flat Stones

Once they reached the settlement known as Gutagard, where the shepherd they had saved lived (which was also a rare trading post in those harsh lands, engaging in occasional bartering with the tribes of Gotland), Putnam received medical attention for his injuries from the two doctors present in the expedition, Istredd and Eberhatt, as well as from some of the local shamans. Meanwhile, the rest of the expedition took the opportunity to rest and regain their strength, grateful for the hospitality shown to them by the Helulandi people, both Skelligers and non-Skelligers.

They also took the chance to inquire more about the area and how the locals managed to survive, gathering valuable information for their onward journey.

The witcher, therefore, would remain in bed for a few days until he finally recovered. He had almost suffered from hypothermia, along with some other injuries, and despite his superhuman physiology due to his condition, his body needed that recovery, regardless of the fact that the time required was shorter than that of an average human. All of this, oddly enough, would serve as a dark prelude to what was to come. Since during those days, the expedition learned about the ongoing events in the area and decided to offer their help. They did so

not only as a gesture of goodwill to the locals for having assisted in Putnam's recovery but also in exchange for more information. The knowledge they had gathered during the witcher's recuperation was not sufficient. It had been an improvement compared to Vinland, but they needed more.

Almost immediately, they learned about what was happening, as it had been recent. It turned out to be a series of mysterious nocturnal attacks that were claiming a high number of victims in the different settlements of the region. This had instilled fear in everyone and put an end to their internal conflicts. Many believed it was a divine punishment from Vidarr for something they had done wrong, while others suspected there was something more sinister at play. Putnam, and consequently the entire expedition, sided with those who believed it was something more than a divine punishment.

Initially, the witcher was hesitant to help. He didn't want to waste potions, knowing the scarcity of resources such as plants and other materials required to prepare them in that part of the world. He wanted to continue traveling and nothing more. However, under the group's pressure, he eventually agreed. With Eberhatt by his side again (as the abilities of the mage and lycanthrope allowed them to save on potion materials if needed), Putnam began investigating what was happening in the "land of flat rocks." Soon, they found the answer: it was not a "vengeance of Vidarr" but rather vampires. This sent chills down Putnam's spine, reminding him of the terrible aftermath of his confrontation with Tuya in Haakland. However, he said nothing and continued the investigation. It was his duty to protect them, and there was no way he could back down now.

After finding out that it wasn't anything divine, having to travel through the different settlements of Heluland for at least a week to do so, Putnam, along with Eberhatt, returned to Gutagard to share the progress made with both the expedition and the locals. With luck, they could devise a plan, although, given that they were dealing with Higher Vampires, as the lycanthrope and the witcher had discovered, the plan would have to be an exceptionally good one to be effective, considering that they were not dealing with just one, but several of these powerful creatures. This made the situation practically insurmountable and highly perilous.

While Putnam did have the assistance of mages, taking down a Higher Vampire was an extremely challenging task, and the chances of victory remained quite low. The odds improved, but not sufficiently enough.

Nevertheless, they had to help. Not only as a gesture of gratitude but also for the vital information they needed to survive until they reached the limits of the Far North and returned. The attacks recurred every week, specifically on weekends. Putnam speculated that they might be young Higher Vampires, suffering from the same "vampiric alcoholism" as Tuya. Alternatively, they simply "came out on weekends for fun" and claimed a large number of victims without considering the consequences for themselves or those left without a drop of blood in their bodies.

It was an incredibly stressful week, one of the most stressful the witcher with bicolored eyes had ever experienced. He was at a loss on what to do, and time was running out. In the end, he decided to resort to a crazy plan—to act as the bait himself. Literally, it was suicidal, and when he asked Istredd to cast a spell to amplify scents so that he could cut himself and lure the vampires to a secluded place where he would fight them, Istredd adamantly refused. But Eberhatt agreed to do it; he understood Putnam's position and his more than likely sacrifice. Due to the heated argument that followed, Istredd eventually tried to inform the rest of the expedition about Putnam's intentions before he carried out the reckless act, but it was too late.

Putnam knew it was the only method they could attempt with their limited resources and time. Sacrificing one life to save hundreds of innocent lives seemed like the only choice. At least it was a fitting way for a witcher to die. The regret he had back then was failing Jolanta once more, and the next news she would receive would likely be of his own death. Although the bait plan might not effectively stop the vampires, it could buy a brief period during which the human settlements could seek help from Vinland or elsewhere and perhaps neutralize the vampires for several decades with a greater force, similar to what had happened in Fox Hollow in Toussaint, although in that case, it was only against one very powerful vampire.

However, luck would be on Putnam's side that time, and while he wouldn't emerge victorious as a hero, he wouldn't die either. It would simply become one more of the many crazy things he had done in his life.

Taking advantage of the limited duration of the simple spell, he marched towards a secluded area, cut his hand with a dagger, and waited for the Higher Vampires to be lured by the false bait—an exaggerated cut enhanced with magic. For the first time in over a decade, Putnam felt a profound sense of peace, the kind that only knowing one's impending death can bring.

The vampires, eager to drink what they thought was a fresh, abundant source of blood, appeared almost immediately. There were four of them, and as Putnam had speculated, they were young. At first, they appeared as ordinary travelers, seemingly willing to "help" and inquiring about the whereabouts of more people (whom the vampires believed they had detected). However, as soon as they saw his medallion, their attitude quickly changed, and they attacked, entering a semi-transformed state for the fight. Putnam then used what would become a prototype of the [Hyper Black Blood Potion](#), which the witches of the [School of the Bat](#) would use in the future. He had inadvertently added amikuk decoction to the formula, having made a mistake in the preparation due to the stress he had been under.

What followed was a fight that started out well but quickly turned against Putnam, as expected, and continued to worsen. Although he defended himself, his plan to poison the vampires with his blood after taking the potion had unforeseen consequences due to his mistake in the formula, and facing four vampires proved to be too much for him in his weakened state. But the worst was yet to come. When the effect of paralysis caused by this unknown new prototype of potion that he had created wore off on the Higher Vampires, they were infuriated and began to "have fun" with the witcher, giving him the beating of his life. Putnam could almost see his life flashing before his eyes.

He was on the brink of passing to the Great Beyond when, at the last moment before his strength was completely depleted, someone from his past appeared to save him. It was none other than Tuya, the Higher Vampire who had helped in Haakland. Tuya had undergone a profound change since then and had taken on a new purpose. She had abandoned Haakland and her obligations there to dedicate herself to tracking down and stopping young vampires from causing massacres and teaching them that having power didn't give them the right to use it irresponsibly and believe themselves superior.

For weeks, Tuya had been following the trail of these four vampires when her path once again crossed with Putnam's. She held a fondness for the witcher, and seeing him in such a state enraged her and brought back memories of their time in Haakland, reminding her of the kindness he had shown her back then.

Although she usually restrained and tried to redirect younger vampires, this time was different. Overwhelmed by her emotions, she killed the four vampires. After finishing them off, she found Putnam in a near-death state and carried him back to the settlement from where he had set out—Gutagard.

Meanwhile, in Gutagard, the expedition and the locals were anxiously waiting, praying that Putnam hadn't gone through with that madness and that he hadn't died. So when Tuya, who quickly came up with the excuse of being on a diplomatic mission once the expedition recognized her, appeared with the witcher in her arms, in that state, they felt a mixture of relief and concern. He was barely alive, so to speak. Fabio, in particular, was deeply affected, as seeing him like that reminded him of when he found Putnam in an equally terrible state six years ago.

After that, due to his condition, Putnam spent the entire autumn and the beginning of winter in bed, recovering and being cared for once again by Istredd and Eberhatt, with the addition of the local shamans, and occasionally Fabio and Tuya until she departed. Putnam tried to convince Tuya to stay, to join the expedition, and to rekindle what they once had together, but the Higher Vampire told him it couldn't be because of her new purpose. However, she expressed her happiness at seeing him alive. Due to these circumstances, although the expedition obtained the necessary information, their progress was also delayed, extending their journey for two long years until they finally reached the Great Glacier.

During his time in bed, Putnam had plenty of time for introspection. He contemplated the fleeting nature of life and the significance of the connections he made with others along his life's journey. He realized that even momentary encounters could leave a lasting impact on one's life, and he grew to appreciate the value of each relationship, no matter how temporary.

Winter in Inis Kharab (Late December of 1286, Mid - February of 1287)

After Putnam's recovery, despite it being early winter and ignoring the advice of the locals, they decided to set out. They believed that with the information they had obtained, their skills, equipment, and the supplies they had, it would be enough to endure until the new season arrived. Their plan was simple: to cross the Great Lake heading north. To do this, they had purchased a small ship and hired Helulandi sailors to assist them. They hoped to make up for lost time and, with luck, reach Gotland before spring. They would rest there until summer and then depart from there to the northernmost point they had heard of—the Great Glacier.

However, their plans would be thwarted by circumstances, eventually forcing them to take a different route. One of the first unexpected encounters was with

the witches of the School of the Owl, whom they had previously considered mythical. They spent most of the rest of the winter together after their ships accidentally collided, causing the expedition's ship to sustain severe damage and begin sinking. The witches of the School of the Owl then invited them on board to their fortress ship named Inis Kharab and set course for the expedition's intended destination, making amends for the inconvenience caused.

Putnam was delighted to meet the Owls, as it meant they were not just a myth, and stories about their participation in the First Witcher Tournament were likely true. Moreover, he had to admit that spending a winter in a witcher fortress pleased him. Despite missing Kaer Seren a lot, finding a "substitute" during this journey was somewhat comforting.

In addition, the Owls, despite their peculiar appearance and deviation from the standard witcher, turned out to be a valuable source of knowledge for the expedition. Conversely, having new people on board the fortress ship after the significant loss of members due to the anti-witcher policies of the duchy of Vespaden was beneficial for the Owls. It made the fortress ship feel less empty and provided them with companionship. Although they were cautious at first, they soon realized what good people the members of the expedition were, and they quickly became great friends. The Owls even affectionately nicknamed Putnam "Eagle Bearer" in recognition of his affiliation with the Griffin School.

To everything mentioned before, it must be added that once the expedition reached its destination and both groups bid farewell, the Owls welcomed the sailors that the expedition had originally hired into their ranks. The sailors willingly joined them, allowing the Owls to handle Inis Kharab more efficiently than with just the 12 members who remained in the school at that time.

And so, that winter, despite all that had happened in his life, was quite happy for Putnam. He made new friends and learned new things (many of which proved useful throughout the rest of his journey in the Far North) while also sharing his own knowledge with his hosts. Particularly beneficial for Putnam (and indirectly for Jalast) was learning more about the monsters of that region, the potions that could be made with the local plants and monsters, and combat techniques. It was undoubtedly a season of growth and learning for him and the Owls witches.

Around mid-February of 1287, the paths of the expedition (and thus Putnam) and the Owls Witches would finally part ways, after thanking each other for everything. Once Inis Kharab crossed the Great Lake and left them at a

destination that was not Gotland but was relatively close.

The Threat of the Ice Giants (Mid - Spring - End of the Summer of 1287)

"I don't know, Istredd. Geralt managed to kill a giant in Undvik, but that was just one, and I'm not as experienced as he is. And please, don't bring up Chernobog in Zerrikania. Killing that dragon was pure luck, and look how it ended up. I was crucified for five days! Thank goodness the bard saved me in the end, anyway."

—Putnam to Istredd shortly after his reunion with Faravid.

After parting ways with the witches of the School of the Owl, the expedition continued traveling, unintentionally heading westward and passing through [Markland](#) due to the challenging weather and terrain conditions. Just like at the beginning of their journey to the Far East, they got lost, and mistakenly thinking they were in Gotland. By the time they realized their mistake, they had to retrace their steps, but they got lost once again, eventually arriving unintentionally in the region of Kvenland, depleting their supplies in the process.

Although they managed to hunt a mammoth on the way and feed themselves, the animal was so large that they couldn't utilize all of it to make provisions. As a result, they simply endured until they reached the territory of the Kvens, where they stayed from mid-spring, when they had arrived, until around the end of summer.

This was due to two reasons: first, the present threat in the region, which the expedition agreed to handle in exchange for refuge and supplies, and secondly because Putnam would once again find love in the form of a völva named Ásgærðr. A völva was a kind of equivalent to an oracle/druid/shaman/witch in the Northern Realms and Vinland, a combination of all these roles. Interestingly, this tradition was originally from the Skellige Islands but had been abandoned in favor of druids. However, in the territories where the Skelligers decided to settle during the early days of Nordling colonization on the Continent, the völva tradition persisted, evolving to encompass the functions of the aforementioned roles in one.

And what was Ásgærðr like? She was a tall, red-haired woman with freckles and a strong character (which, of course, suited Putnam's usual taste). She also possessed some exotic features that indicated some Skraeling ancestry, likely from her grandparents or great-grandparents. Unlike in Vinland, in Kvenland, both the Skelligers and Skraelings had mixed to the point of giving rise to a new people, and culture born out of syncretism—the Kvens.

In fact, although the Kvens spoke the Nordling Common Tongue, it was a highly distorted dialect (though relatively understandable, around 50%) primarily used for trade with Vinland. The Kvens also had their own language, a creole tongue that emerged from the early Skellige jargon and Skraeling languages.

At first glance, völvas might appear similar to wiccias or witches (not to be confused with Female Witchers) in the Northern Realms or vedmas in [Kwanland](#). However, upon closer investigation, one would realize how different they were from these two types of women with magical abilities.

The expedition was already familiar with the term, both because Istredd knew of it from his knowledge of history (though not its evolution) and, more importantly, because they had encountered some völvas in Heluland. While they had less authority than in Kvenland, they still held significant power and were highly respected.

The threat was none other than giants. Ice giants (or more accurately, wrongly called ice giants due to their blue skin, as they were not trolls capable of fully adapting to their environment like ice trolls). Putnam had heard rumors and legends, especially about Geralt's feat in Undvik. Although he didn't rule out the possibility that giants might still exist outside the Northern Realms, he was surprised to learn that they were common in that part of the world. He had thought that human presence would have somehow eradicated them, especially knowing that the Owls witchers existed and were not just a myth. Despite being reluctant, as he tried to avoid killing sentient creatures whenever possible, he ultimately accepted the task. They needed the food to continue their journey and perhaps, the information the locals could provide to reach the Great Glacier.

All of this happened after a meeting with the kunin (a title roughly equivalent to king) of Kvenland, named Faravid. He promised them both supplies and shelter in exchange for dealing with the threat before winter arrived. None of his best warriors had succeeded in the task, he didn't want to risk his völva, and the messengers sent to find the witchers of the School of the Owl had returned empty-handed. The twelve remaining members of that school refused to face the giants due to the risks involved since they were few and the only witcher school that still remained not extinct in the Far North at that time.

To carry out the task, Putnam teamed up with Istredd. The mage knew enough about ancient history and had the appropriate magical skills to be useful when

dealing with the giants. He even had a theory (which he had written and published a thesis about) that it was possible to reason with the giants and wanted to put it to the test. However, humans, as always, preferred violence over dialogue. This theory had arisen from rumors that the witcher from the School of the Bear known as Junod of Belhaven was half giant and half dwarf.

Putnam also preferred that option because, honestly, he didn't see himself capable of killing giants. So when the mage offered to accompany him, he didn't hesitate for a single moment.

Their objective was simple, yet complicated. They aimed to stop the giants from invading and plundering the Kven stationary spring, summer, and autumn settlements, and to let them be. The Kvens believed that the giants came from the mountains, where many of the region's rivers originated. So, witcher and mage set course in that direction, not before thoroughly preparing themselves. Meanwhile, Fabio and the other members of the expedition integrated with the Kvens and collected written information about their culture.

During that time of preparation, Putnam was offered shelter in the völva's house, not by Favarid's orders but simply because the woman offered to host him. It was thanks to this that their romance slowly started to blossom.

To achieve this, they traveled to the mountains, specifically to the mountain known to the Kvens as Utgardar, where it was said that the leader of the ice giants, Skrýmir, resided. The plan was to negotiate if the giant was capable of reasoning and not attacking them, as legends and rumors about his kind suggested. They aimed to reach an agreement that would benefit both the Kvens and the giants, and that would be the end of it. However, if negotiation failed, the mage and the witcher would face Skrýmir, leaving the giants without a leader and hopefully putting an end to the problem, as the legends stated that giants, much like the once-common [orcs](#) in places like Magne, needed a leader to follow, or else they would not know how to act.

The challenge was that they were relying on legends, so they were hoping that part was truth rather than exaggeration or distortions from such ancient tales.

They traveled by river for a part of the journey, even against the current. The Kvens had developed such a culture of navigation that they were able to navigate these natural obstacles skillfully. For another part of the journey, they traveled on horseback. Along the river route, Putnam faced the usual drowners, encountered the unfamiliar in practice (though not in theory) qalupaliks, and

finally dealt with vodyanois mounted on what Istredd called "aquatic unicorns," but which were later known as narwhals. After two days, they finally arrived at Utgardar.

Once in the mountain, they began searching. It was an easy task, too easy. Not because of Putnam's witcher senses, but because the giants had been careless, leaving many clues as to where they had passed, as if they wanted to be found. It was odd to leave traces for your "enemy" to discover and attack you, especially since they were supposedly at "war" with the Kvens. One would think they would be more cautious. The giants' carelessness could be attributed to their ego due to their physical superiority or their lack of intelligence. However, even trolls, with their primitive intelligence, were smart enough in that aspect, so this behavior was strange, to say the least.

And so strange it was because during their search for the giants' lair, they fell into a simple trap and became its victims, understanding at that moment that the giants had set traps all over the mountains against the Kvens warriors. They tumbled into a hole, knocked unconscious by the fall, only to wake up later in the giants' lair. It was an enormous cave that gave the impression of being a primitive "palace," surrounded by a group of giants and some cyclopes. The group seemed to be led by a being with blue skin and a single eye, resembling a cross between a cyclops and a giant, whom they assumed was Skrýmir. Surprisingly, he observed them not with hatred but with curiosity. And soon enough, he made his first attempts at communication, finding them intriguing as they were unlike any Kven they had encountered before.

So, Skrýmir spoke in a rougher version of the dialect of the Common Tongue used by the Kvens, making it difficult for Putnam, Istredd, and the giant leader to understand each other at first. It took a while for the witcher and the mage to comprehend his words, and more importantly, for Skrýmir to understand them. Since when they attempted communication on their part, they also struggled, as their accents and idioms proved challenging for the crossbreed of cyclops and giant and his companions (though the latter remained silent).

The mage and the witcher tried to persuade Skrýmir to leave the Kvens in peace and stop attacking them along with his giants, but they were unsuccessful. Skrýmir claimed that the Kvens had invaded his territory, but the Kvens had already informed them before departing that, if the giant leader could reason, that they had been passing through that territory for generations and only approximately every five winters. They insisted they were not invading

anything and merely occupied a small area and used very few resources for their temporary settlements.

Istredd and Putnam tried to convey the Kvens' position to Skrýmir, but the crossbreed of cyclops and giant remained obstinate and refused to back down. In fact, he became even more enraged and almost devoured them. It was only when Putnam intervened at the last moment with a proposal (which Istredd found somewhat absurd) for Skrýmir that they were saved from being eaten. This proposal was nothing more and nothing less than a beer-drinking contest (or the closest alcoholic beverage the giants had). The loser would have to immediately accept the conditions imposed by the other party. Surprisingly, Skrýmir agreed to this challenge. If he lost, they would be devoured, but if Putnam and Istredd won, the giants would leave that territory and head further north, leaving the Kvens in peace forever.

Putnam and Istredd had to wait for a while to be set free. The giants and cyclopes under Skrýmir's command had to travel to the deepest parts of the mountain to fetch the "beer" and start the contest.

Or well, what the giants called beer, because in reality, it was a fermented tundra drink that Istredd found repulsive. Putnam, on the other hand, had consumed witcher's potions with a worse taste, so it wasn't that bad for him. His main concern was the size of the barrels they brought. Being creatures standing at 13 feet tall, the barrels were enormous, and not even he, with his higher alcohol tolerance due to his witcher's condition, could handle that much.

So while the giants were preparing everything for the contest, Putnam approached Istredd as best he could and whispered his plan in the mage's ear, asking if he could cast spells to transport the contents of the barrels while he pretended to drink. Istredd said yes, he could open portals even if they were small ones in the barrels, but wouldn't the giants notice it? Putnam assured him that they wouldn't. Besides, the gestures to open a portal did not make his hands glow or anything like that, so he could always camouflage it by pretending to stretch, claiming it was due to being tied up for so long.

The mage, although reluctant, accepted the excuse as valid and went along with the plan, trusting that the giants were foolish enough not to realize that he was casting spells to open portals.

After that, they were finally released, and the tundra beer drinking contest began. Skrýmir called upon one of his subordinates, a giantess known as

Nerthus, to serve as Istredd's rival, ensuring they would be evenly matched.

First, it was Putnam against Skrýmir. But before that, due to the size of the barrels, Putnam improvised something with his silver chain, using it to climb and reach the beer inside the barrels. Istredd waited for a signal, which they had agreed would be a hand gesture to stop, allowing the mage to open portals inside the barrels and empty their contents.

The first rounds between Putnam and Skrýmir were tied, each winning three out of three barrels. Putnam drank as much as he could, made the signal, and Istredd pretended to stretch while secretly opening portals, making the remaining contents disappear, and so on. None of the giants suspected anything.

But the following rounds became more complicated. Putnam got increasingly drunk and forgot to give the signal gradually, causing them to lose, with Skrýmir winning that time. Now it was Istredd's turn against Nerthus. If Istredd won, there would be a tie-breaking round between Putnam and Skrýmir, and the contest would be over. However, it was more challenging for Istredd since Putnam couldn't open portals. Still, the mage believed he would find a way to manage. And indeed, at least initially, he did. He found a way to pretend to drink and perform the gesture to open portals, impressing Putnam. It seemed like a feat worthy of any circus acrobat, although not as spectacular as the spell Yennefer once cast with her leg, it came close, at least a bit.

Still, Istredd couldn't keep up the act the whole time because the giants continued bringing more and more barrels. Eventually, he got drunk, even though he was drinking slowly. This caused him to fail a portal spell when he was already very intoxicated, and the contents of the barrel, which were supposed to go to a distant location, ended up falling on Skrýmir. This enraged Skrýmir, who wanted to kill them both and call off the contest.

However, just like the first time, but with even more alcohol in his system, Putnam intervened. He told Skrýmir and his giants that if they were going to devour him, they should at least let him relieve himself. He explained that he wouldn't fill their mouths with his urine and such, as it would be undignified even for someone about to be eaten. Surprisingly, Skrýmir agreed, giving Putnam permission to go and urinate at the back of the cave. This bought them both time because Skrýmir intended to devour them together. And unintentionally, during the process of trying to urinate, Putnam stumbled, and some of his witcher's potions fell, rolled, and spilled their liquid into the barrels

of tundra beer. Unbeknownst to him, this would end up saving both him and Istredd.

By the time Putnam returned, Skrýmir had decided that it wouldn't be right to eat them without something to drink. So, he brought more beer and offered the barrels that were now contaminated with the witcher's potions to the giants, who, along with Skrýmir, drank from them without a second thought before proceeding to devour the witcher and the mage. However, they died instantly due to the toxicity of the potions.

Putnam and Istredd, due to their extreme drunkenness, were surprised to see the giants falling one by one and couldn't help but laugh. Well, it wasn't what they had expected, but the problem was solved. It must be said, though, that Putnam had no plan; all of this happened purely by chance, hence his reaction.

After that, they endured a terrible hangover for a day and then returned to the Kvens. It took them three days, and the Kven who had been waiting for them by the river was worried that something had happened to them but relieved to see them return. When they arrived and told the whole story, the people were so amazed that, even though it had been an accident, they couldn't help but see Putnam as a hero. They bestowed upon him the nickname *Jierrahitájgge* (The Giant Slayer) and organized a celebration in his honor. Putnam refused several times, saying it had all been pure chance, but the people didn't listen and organized the party anyway. It was at this party where the romance with the völva finally began.

"Surrounded by spirits" (the romance with Ásgærðr)

The celebration, although in honor of Putnam for defeating the giants, was also held in honor of Lieabolmmai, the god of hunting. The Kvens believed that it was this god who had given Putnam the ability to defeat the giants by causing him to trip and poison their beer as if it were a trap for hunting animals. To a lesser extent, the celebration also honored Thor, for acting through the witcher and delivering justice for the Kvens, who could now live without the threat of being exterminated by the giants.

The highlight of the celebration was a lavish banquet (which worried Putnam about the Kvens running out of reserves for the winter) along with the usual music and games. Fortunately, the völva managed to reassure him about that, saying that he sometimes tended to be too humble and that he should enjoy the festivities. The games mainly consisted of activities that honored the

aforementioned gods, such as archery contests, among others. As for the dances, they were traditional Kven dances.

Although initially hesitant, Putnam gradually started enjoying the celebration, mainly driven by Ásgærðr's charisma and charm. While he didn't eat much, as he wasn't very hungry, he did partake in the drinking, joined in the games (although he didn't perform well in archery, with Fabio ending up in a better position than him, but still not beating any of the Kvens), and most importantly, he danced with Ásgærðr. He quickly picked up the dance patterns (which reminded him of certain combat patterns from the School of the Griffin) and seemed to blend in with the Kvens shortly after starting to dance with the red-haired völva.

It was during the dance, gradually, like two cranes in mating season, that they started to connect through movement and music. Their romance, which had been slowly building over the days Putnam had spent at the völva's house, had not yet reached its climax. However, in that moment, thanks to the dance (and the help of alcohol), it came close to its peak. Nevertheless, despite the palpable tension and love in the air, they hesitated to take the first step forward, and so the romance had to wait a little longer.

Putnam was still affected by the breakup with Jolanta, even though he was the one who initiated it. He didn't regret his decision, as he had a debt to Fabio for metaphorically allowing him to "be born again," but at the same time, he missed Jolanta. As for Ásgærðr, she was reportedly abandoned by what, in Skellige myths, would be the equivalent of a Fire Giant. This explained the certain contempt some Kvens had towards her due to all the recent events involving giants.

Subsequent theories about this race of the ogroid family speculated that they could be a smaller subspecies of giants compared to the Ice Giant that Geralt defeated in Undvik. They were said to have characteristics such as red skin and greater fire resistance. Based on the stories about the witcher Junod of the School of the Bear, it was believed that these giants could be around 9 feet tall on average, if not even smaller but with intense ogroid features. This, to some extent, made sense in explaining how a dwarf and a giantess could have reproduced and given rise to Junod.

It would be only once Ásgærðr and Putnam had dinner, which took place after the celebration (since Putnam was quite hungry by then), their romance would finally erupt after so much tension. It happened somewhat abruptly, it must be

said, as the dinner turned into an argument that became violent (especially on the part of the völva, due to her fear of abandonment) when Putnam was extremely sincere as part of his improvement regarding his traumas and mental health. The argument continued, resulting in Putnam injuring a tendon in his foot when Ásgærðr attacked him (more specifically, the right one), and it ended with a passionate night between the two.

After that night, a "day after" occurred that reminded Putnam of the one he had with D'yaebi, with some aspects of the one with Marina, but much less uncomfortable. This was due to both the changes he had undergone and the völva herself. Although she was a complicated woman, she wasn't as difficult as the deceased witcheress, yet not as composed and resolved as the innkeeper. One could say she was somewhere in between.

When Putnam woke up, he woke up with fear - fear of having fallen back into old habits that he had sworn to leave behind for the sake of the women he had been with and himself. However, when the völva woke up, she reassured him that such fear was unfounded, reminding him of his words and attitudes from the previous night in a much calmer and reflective manner without getting angry or starting an argument, apologizing also in the process. This had an effect on the witcher, showing him that despite the struggle (including setbacks), his progress regarding the deep wounds in his mind was slowly bearing fruit, and that each day could be a little better (something that the witcher usually forgets during these days). For example, he had almost healed the trauma of losing Tubiel and Sigurd, as he indirectly demonstrated to Jolanta (which was a very significant step in itself).

Thus, Ásgærðr became, after that day, not just another woman who would teach him a lesson to apply over time, but the one who helped alleviate to a great extent the burden of self-loathing, which had been maintained, because of things like the death of Nabla and D'yaebi (not guilt, the guilt would endure more). Perhaps it was her connection with the world of spirits, or perhaps it was something else. But the truth is that she aided in healing, at least to a large extent, that challenging part of Putnam's psyche that many had tried to mend before but none had succeeded, being the closest thing what Hira achieved during her brief romance with the witcher before the appearance of the völva in Putnam's life. It was a end of spring and subsequent summer, not idyllic or bucolic like when he was with Marina, but a good summer nonetheless. It provided a much-needed respite from what lay ahead for him and the

expedition. If one could call it summer that climate in Kvenland, because when there was no snow, it was more akin to a very damp spring than anything else. To Putnam, it reminded him of the "little summer" in Kovir, but with a longer duration.

That summer, apart from enjoying that, literally speaking, "summer love," the witcher also took on some contracts. The usual, you know. It's not like the Kvens paid in coin (most of their trade with Vinland happened through barter and occasionally with gold nuggets, nuggets with which, for example, they paid the high taxes in Vinland before the tournament), but Putnam didn't mind. He was already satisfied with the supplies for the expedition and accommodation. He did those contracts as a show of gratitude. The only things he occasionally asked for were repairs for his swords, medical attention or materials for potions.

Some contracts were done in the company of the völva (especially those involving spirits), others with warriors, some alone, and others on the vessels that the Kvens used to navigate the rivers, with the latter being the most abundant. Thanks to the Kvens, Putnam developed a liking for vessels and navigation, which would be essential for the future School of the Crane he would found. In fact, he became a decent sailor (not remarkable or expert, it must be said) thanks to his time with these people from the Far North.

That's why it wasn't uncommon during that summer to see the future Grandmaster of the Cranes spending hours on the riverbanks, sitting, learning from the Kven sailors, and then putting it all into practice.

During this time, some of the monsters Putnam defeated were a subspecies of drowners native to the Far North, a stallo (which Putnam speculated might be a relative of ghouls, but he wasn't sure), a water draug, a gufittar (a monster that Putnam could never classify correctly, although Jalast could), an ulda (basically a subspecies of nekkers that lived entirely underground, found in caves, grottos and mines), a Devourer of Sins (another spirit, a kind of "variant" of a Noonwraith), and a zaharus (a type of spirit that caused an illness similar to the sleeping sickness found in territories like Zangvebar, with the added twist of spreading easily and inducing nightmares). The information obtained from the Owls Witchers during his winter in Inis Kharab was helpful in dealing with some of these creatures, but for others, not so much.

But everything must come to an end, and the time of the expedition with the Kvens also did, as the end of summer approached and autumn was just around

the corner. Therefore, Putnam and the völva also had to part ways.

Interestingly, of all the healthy breakups the witcher had experienced, this was one of the most, if not the most, painless. It was painful, but not overwhelmingly so; it could be likened to the discomfort of removing a splinter. Both of them knew that this would happen sooner or later, and that their time together was limited. From the very beginning of their relationship, it was something they had accepted.

So, when the day came, the farewell was not as heartbreakingly as one might imagine in such cases. Both of them knew that life had brought them together for a brief moment, and they had chosen to make this moment shine (not in a hedonistic way, but on a personal, almost spiritual level) instead of dwelling on a future that could be, but deep down they knew was impossible. Of course, they wished that life would bring them together again, but they had both understood that if that wasn't the case, at least they had made their relationship something memorable and that they would cherish in the most distant of futures, not with nostalgia but with joy for all the ways it allowed them to evolve and improve as individuals.

For Putnam, it was the help that Asg (as he affectionately called her) provided him with regarding his low self-esteem stemming from the mentioned self-loathing he felt. She gave him the healing that Hira, as mentioned before, had begun but couldn't finish due to her death. And for Asg, it was how Putnam (ironically, being a mutant and mentally tormented) made her feel at peace and reconnected with her lost humanity once again. It was as if the witcher, unintentionally, had repaid that favor to Tubiel for the humanity that the Lioness of Brenna had given him back in the day, through the völva.

"Cold Roses" (Autumn - Winter of 1287)

The next stop of the expedition was the long-awaited (though not as eagerly anticipated as the Great Glacier) Gotland. The region was once an island in the distant past and was once dominated by the Gots tribe, from which it was said that all tribes who inhabited the area originated. Now, it was nothing more than a memory of a distant past, gradually becoming a legend.

In Gotland, they began to experience the first, stronger effects of the cold weather, as their autumn was even harsher than that of Kovir. The experience they had there would leave a significant mark on them, ensuring that at least on their part (and to a lesser extent, influencing the rest), that the future

colonization of the Western Continent and the Silk Islands would not be as violent as the nordling colonization of the Continent had been so long ago. Serving as an example of how even the most violent societies can become more refined and better than their ancestors, without losing sight of the good and the bad of their past.

The situation in Gotland was divided into two parts. In the south, in the zone of influence of Vinland, things were calm since the failure of the knightly orders of the duchy in converting the tribal people there. In the north, in the zone of influence of Kaedwen and the territory of Saskia, the relatively recently proclaimed [Republic of Nemet](#), the situation was different.

During their journey through the southern region going north, they didn't encounter any tribes, but they did find traces of their active presence, as if they were hiding. Soon, they would understand why.

In the northernmost part of Gotland, under the influence of Nemet, it was relatively safe. Saskia had managed to integrate the tribes into the State she originally intended to create in the Northern Kingdoms but had to move further north to ensure its survival and growth. She respected their cultures and protected them when necessary, in exchange for a fair exploitation of their resources, mainly mines, by the dwarves who had joined her. These resources were sold to acquire the materials needed to build a sense of civilization in such a harsh environment. Progress was slow, but civilization was slowly emerging.

In contrast, the situation was very different in the area under the influence of Kaedwen. Kaedwen, realizing that a war with Redania wouldn't be beneficial, chose to expand to the east with the intention of becoming a power similar to its rival kingdom. To achieve this, they seeked the help of knightly orders to pacify or exterminate the possible inhabitants of the region, as well as to deal with other potential threats along the way. For this task, they convinced the restored Order of the Flaming Rose to settle in Kaedwen by offering them better conditions than in Redania and using them as "mercenaries," thereby avoiding risking their own army until they had secured the new lands. Although there were already some Kaedweni trappers living in the Far North, they hadn't been able to establish a strong presence over the years.

Amidst all this, a young Anika Masir, 24 years old at the time, was serving as a sorceress advisor in the kingdom and opposed the expansion. She argued that

Kaedwen had enough resources; they only needed better management to become a power on par with Redania. Additionally, she pointed out that the discovery of minerals in Kovir was simply a stroke of luck and that the land they were seeking to conquer was too harsh. However, her advice fell on deaf ears, mainly due to her youth and the prejudice that still lingered against sorceresses following the Witch Hunts a decade ago and the scandal of the Lodge in Loc Muinne, which remained fresh in collective memory.

In Gotland, the expedition didn't encounter a "grand adventure" or face a "great danger." Instead, they found something more mundane but equally challenging compared to everything they had faced before – a people in need of help. However, they didn't need heroes to restore the status quo, as that was no longer possible. They needed people who would assist them in finding a way out and a better future, even if it meant leaving their homeland behind.

When they reached the north of Gotland (the region under Kaedwen's influence), they found not a massacre but extermination. It was the result of religious fanaticism that had grown to an extreme level due, among other factors, to nordling mentality and the harsh climate of the area. Several tribes were completely destroyed, now reduced to mere memories that would soon fade away. The impact on the expedition was so profound that at first, they even refused to believe it was a human act, since the cruelty displayed surpassed even what the average nordling might have known, seen, or experienced. However, after Putnam and the mages investigated, they confirmed that it was indeed human and from nordling origin when they found a emblem of the Order of the Flaming Rose among the corpses. It was then that they vowed, within their power, to prevent such things from happening again during their travels to explore the world – not by fighting them, but by preventing them from the start if they can.

For much of the journey in northern Gotland after discovering the extermination, they remained alert, for although they had found no signs of civilization other than the aforementioned deaths, they did not know how the people present there would react to their presence, whether they were the perpetrators of the deaths or possible survivors. And they did well, even if at first it seemed that they did not, since eventually, they would end up finding more people in that place. Not those sent by Kaedwen, at least not directly, but tribals. Tribals who had survived. The only ones, in fact, the tribe known as the Oyrühr. They had survived not only due to their fierceness and isolation (which was no longer

useful to them) from other tribes but also because of the help of a renegade knight named Vallaryel. He had joined them at the last moment, realizing his mistakes and preventing them from being "purified by eternal fire" in a surprise nighttime attack that his by then former knightly order wanted to carry out to finish the work of cleansing those lands for Kaedweni settlement. After their attempts at pacification had failed, they chose to undertake a crusade to clean up against what they considered "barbarians."

The encounter with the Oyruhr, therefore, was destined to be violent, as although the Oyruhr had integrated Vallaryel into their tribe, it had been a lengthy process after they captured him, and he began his redemption. He helped them with what was mentioned before, learning their language, and eventually joining them, as already mentioned, at the last moment. He served not as a guide but as a companion who would help them, adding the tribe's knowledge of the region, to escape from Gotland using routes that the Order of the Flaming Rose would not use. By the time both groups of people met, the Oyruhr greeted anyone who was not one of their own with hostility, attacking with arrows and spears. The expedition came under attack, but fortunately, they managed to take cover and only received minor injuries. They avoided resorting to violence with a counterattack after Vallaryel spoke with them, and he decided to thoroughly interrogate the expedition to find out if they were hostile and, equally important, if they were part of the people sent by Kaedwen. After several hours of interrogation, Vallaryel confirmed that they were not a threat, giving the Oyruhr the green light that they were not people who wanted to harm them. He even suggested that having them with the tribe would be beneficial since they were "powerful" people.

The tribe debated it, and the expedition also did so after Vallaryel told them that if they wanted to join the Oyruhr to avoid any encounters with the Order of the Flaming Rose and head to the land of Nemet, which the knight had heard about a bit further north from where they were. With both groups accepting the alliance, as it was mutually beneficial, the Oyruhr gained protection, and the expedition advanced further towards their objective. Additionally, they could collect all the knowledge the tribe had in written form for their survival during the rest of the journey and also for its preservation, and for future in-depth study.

It was then, once united with the Oyruhr, that Putnam was forced to confront his prejudices against knights when he got to know Vallaryel in depth. He considered that whether they belonged to orders or were wandering knights, they were all

morally decadent, especially those followers of Lebioda, as they preached a lot, and when they wanted to lead by example, they ultimately ended up corrupting it. Putnam had noticed this in the past, particularly during the tournament in Cidaris. In fact, Charz was the only "knight" he truly respected back then. If he had agreed to investigate the murder during the tournament, it was for the money and to prevent the killer from remaining at large and killing more people, nothing more, once he had dealt with all the knights.

On Vallaryel's part, he held similar prejudices. He had no fondness for witches, especially those of the Griffin School, whom he saw as "emotionless mutants who only killed for money" and "false knights who tarnished the name of authentic and pure knights."

Many of their initial tensions that could have led to a fight were avoided by Mazheva, the eldest daughter of the tribe's leader, who always intervened when necessary, acting as an intermediary and the voice of reason during their journey to Saskia's "promised land." Her interventions became instrumental in turning the witcher and the knight into friends. Mazheva herself also became friends with Putnam, forming a curious trio - the witcher, the knight, and the tribal girl who, in Nordling terms, could be considered a "princess."

The journey went smoothly, with only a few incidents involving monsters and patrols that were relatively close and had to be eliminated. Due to this, Istredd proposed that they try to eliminate all of them and leave the land for the tribe. However, everyone, including the tribe with their limited knowledge of the world beyond Gotland, agreed that it was not feasible. The enemies were too numerous, well-equipped, and armed. It would take them a long time, and in the process, they could lose even more people. It was harsh and sad, but they had no other choice if they wanted to avoid risking the lives of those who remained. Perhaps if Saskia's state prospered more, things could change, and the Oyruhr could return to their land, even if it was more sparsely populated. However, that was yet to be seen, and it would take decades to know if it would come to pass or not. The Oyruhr even came to appreciate Putnam and the expedition quite a bit, giving each of them nicknames in their language. In the case of Putnam, he became known to the Oyruhr as "*Gollegriff*," a name derived from the nickname that Jezkier gave him back in the day.

During that period, life offered Putnam another new romance, this time with Mazheva, and he wouldn't refuse, despite Vallaryel considering it immoral. As

previously mentioned, Putnam had learned to value connections even if they were brief, so he let himself be carried away once more, hoping that this new romance would be a balm for some of the many wounds in his soul, much like Asg had been, or at least another pillar to aid in his complete reconstruction. In that sense, the Oryuhr "princess" did not disappoint, for there was much wisdom in her eyes, which both Nordlings and Nilgaardians might consider "backward." Learning from her, he was reminded once again of the lesson to care for those within his circle, his family, and not to overextend himself. He shouldn't try to be the hero and fight for things beyond his control, something Putnam had forgotten since the deaths of Tubiel and Sigurd in his search for meaning and that spark that had given him so much humanity the connection he once had with the Lioness of Brenna.

As for Mazheva, both physically and emotionally, she was within the standard for Putnam's tastes; there isn't much more to say. Another redhead with light eyes (with a few strands of blond hair) and a strong character. Personality-wise, she vaguely reminded to Putnam of a mix between Tubiel and Jolanta.

Their romance would last until they reached the territories of Gotland influenced by Nemet. De jure, they were not a protectorate, but de facto, one could say they were. There, the Oryuhr and the expedition would part ways forever. The expedition would continue north, with their next planned stop being Nemet, while the tribe would stay in that place they hoped to call home, far away from the "civilized" selfishness that always wanted more and more. They aimed to prosper again without the fear of being exterminated for living differently.

The Frozen Utopia (Winter of 1287 - Spring of 1288)

"If all goes according to plan, you will unquestionably alter the course of history. There's no doubt that Nemet will become a topic of discussion in the North. Thank you, Saskia, for everything."

—Fabio Sachs to Saskia the day that the expedition departed from **Nemet** to resume their journey.

Their passage through Nemet was also calm and without notable incidents. What they encountered was an emerging nation and little more. Originally, they wanted to continue further north without stopping, but they were forced to spend the winter there due to the harshness of the climate, which was marked by its terrible blizzards.

However, they didn't remain idle despite the setback. Even though their journey

would be prolonged, the extra time there would serve them well in establishing contacts and, hopefully, securing a new trade treaty for Kovir. They were willing to assist in any way possible, no matter how perilous, to support the still young republic and gain the trust of her leader.

True, it wasn't anything spectacular, and every settlement they passed through reminded them (at least those who had been on the expedition to the Far East to Valkare, but covered in snow) and the others of the poorer regions of Vinland. Nevertheless, they could still sense the effort Saskia had put into it, the residents' happiness despite the hardships, and the potential Nemet held to become a great nation and a true haven for non-humans, where each race could contribute its best qualities to create a bright future.

Saskia had even managed to communicate with the white dragons of the area, persuading several to leave their territory undisturbed, at least when it came to hunting, and even ensuring that these dragons would help them defend it if necessary.

The expedition was received quite well by the inhabitants of the republic that had been named in honor of the dwarf named Nemetvyn who had suggested they venture so far away. Despite everything, Nemet had become the dreamed-of state by Saskia, where all races could coexist in peace. It's true that they struggled to survive, but at least there it was only the climate they battled against, not potential invasions. The dragoness was more than convinced that this would be a state that would serve as a great example to others, helping improve coexistence in the future. In fact, they were welcomed by Saskia herself, who, upon learning of the visit by foreigners, sought them out. At first, she was concerned that they might be from the people sent by Kaedwen, but that concern vanished as soon as she met them. She even quickly accepted the trade treaty proposal that Fabio made on behalf of the Kingdom of Kovir.

The only ones who didn't receive them well were Iorveth and his Scoia'tael elves, who had left with Saskia on the day she decided to establish her state in those inhospitable lands. However, Saskia eventually managed to convince the elves that the expedition members posed no threat. On the contrary, they were a blessing since they had a witcher among them. This would spare them from losing more people due to the monster problems in the area, which made life even more complicated than it already was. This convinced Iorveth to abandon his plans of embarking on an expedition with his men to search for the semi-mythical [Aen Ghele](#), who could assist them in surviving better in those

challenging lands – a request that lorveth had been making to Saskia for some time. It was here that the expedition first heard about this separate and mysterious tribe of elves as such.

Putnam, as had happened in Kvenland, took it upon himself to address the monster problems that in that case, the republic was currently grappling with. These monsters were impeding various advancements, particularly the establishment of safe transportation routes and more. In return for his efforts, Putnam during that winter, requested shelter, food, and provisions for the future. And occasionally, he also asked for some compensation in the form of gems, given the active mines, as a way to offset the challenges posed by winter work. Saskia readily agreed to this arrangement.

Meanwhile, the other members of the expedition attended to different tasks. Istredd and Eberhatt focused on assisting the residents with health-related concerns. Jabolet delved into investigating the monsters that Putnam had defeated and brought back, while Fabio spent considerable time with Saskia and the local inhabitants, gaining a deeper understanding of everything she had established in that region.

Among the monsters that Putnam had to deal with, there were ice trolls who couldn't be convinced by the trolls that had joined Saskia to become part of the republic. These ice trolls were raiding the inhabitants traveling between settlements. Putnam attempted to negotiate with them as well, but he achieved nothing, and in the end, he had to kill them. There were also nuckelavees that inhabited the areas with underground lakes, underground rivers, or underground water passages. These creatures primarily targeted the dwarves who had built their homes in the rocks, cultivated crops indoors (as barely anything grew outside), or extracted water from these areas for various uses. Mahahas, a kind of equivalent to drowners but in cold climates and on land. These creatures were plentiful and had been the leading cause of death for many of the people who had joined Saskia initially. Although they managed to deal with them, having a witcher was beneficial to significantly reduce their numbers and keep them under control. A chenoo, something that the residents of Nemet believed to be only a myth from the tribes inhabiting to the south of the republic, but it turned out to be real. It became one of Putnam's toughest fights (excluding the one he had against the Higher Vampires), as he didn't know what it was and struggled to figure out how to defeat it until he stumbled upon the key to its demise by sheer luck. He needed a week to recover from the encounter. The

monster was a headache when it came to classification, and it remained as a relic in bestiaries for a long time.

And finally, a krampus – the dreadful monster believed to have been eradicated by witchers in the Northern Realms – was still present there. In fact, it was a frozen specimen that a group of halflings exploring the territory of Nemet uncovered while in search of the mythical frozen princess from Nordlings' legends. They believed she might be located in the area and accidentally awakened the krampus when they discovered the room where the princess was rumored to have secluded herself, due to being unable to "let it go."

For this challenging contract, Putnam wouldn't be alone. Recognizing the formidable strength of the krampus, he harbored doubts about his ability to defeat it single-handedly, even with thorough preparation. Thus, he enlisted the assistance of Jabolet and Eberhatt. Soon after, Saskia joined their efforts, followed by a pair of dwarves, all drawn to the cause after learning about the creature that the witcher was about to confront.

It was also during this contract that Putnam would meet Roth, the future dwarf who would serve as the master blacksmith and cook for several generations at the Crane School, as well as the uncle to Putnam's adopted children (that is, the first generation of Cranes), whom Putnam would end up saving for a certain death. This act incurred a life debt from the dwarf, leading him to join the expedition, becoming close friends throughout the remainder of the journey. Although they would part ways upon returning to the Northern Kingdoms, their contact and friendship remained unbroken. With Roth returning to his native Mahakam, as Putnam had promised to settle the life debt later. In reality, Putnam intended to nullify the debt, as saving Roth's life hadn't been any trouble to him. However, Roth's stubbornness prevailed, and Putnam had to come up with an excuse, using that promise. Ironically, this excuse later became a truth when he needed him to establish the school.

It would only be once the area was sufficiently secure for Nemet to continue prospering without as many setbacks, and once the trade agreement that Saskia had agreed to sign on behalf of Nemet with Kovir was ready and signed, that the expedition would depart from the young republic and continue its journey to the northernmost end of the Continent. Based on the information they had gathered, Fabio estimated that they had only about two or three months of travel remaining. Their departure would take place in the spring of 1288, when

the perpetual snows of the republic's territory were thinner and the blizzards were less frequent. But not before expressing gratitude to Saskia and all the non-human inhabitants of the republic for their hospitality and camaraderie. They promised Saskia to carry her message of unity and harmony among races to the Northern Kingdoms, without revealing the location of Nemet (at least, until the republic had a better defensive capability and more trained people, just in case).

Reaching the End (Spring of 1288)

As the expedition left Nemet behind, they were met with a stark landscape of frigid cold, snow-covered terrain, a scattering of trees, and the occasional presence of animals and monsters that inhabited the area for at least a month and a half. They managed to avoid most of the latter, as even for Putnam, with information provided by the Owls Witchers, they were unfamiliar threats. He preferred to flee rather than confront them, considering the risk of having the mages or himself injured in that remote part of the world would be highly dangerous for the rest of the group. Nonetheless, he made note of what he could observe and attempted to create sketches to better understand and study these monsters in the future if he encountered again for som reason.

This pattern continued until they encountered the [Tuathasgia Mountains](#), which they suspected (and their intuition proved right) would be their final obstacle on the journey. To their surprise, they stumbled upon civilization once again. It wasn't anything extraordinary, but people were living there, primarily in villages. This both surprised and pleased them, as it reflected the resilient spirit of humanity. Istredd speculated that the mountains might have acted as a natural barrier, creating a comparatively hospitable microclimate to the rest of the area, which could explain why they hadn't come across human presence until now.

The mountains were enormous, even larger than the Dragon Mountains, and undoubtedly crossing them would pose a challenge. So, they chose to communicate with the locals and restore their strength in some of the villages. This proved to be a daunting task as neither the locals nor the members of the expedition spoke each other's languages. However, they eventually managed to understand each other, regain their energy, engage in trade, and most importantly, secure a guide to assist them through the mountains. This guide, known as a "sherpa" in the terminology that would later be adopted by the Nordlings, was named Binsa. Thanks to Binsa's assistance, albeit with difficulty, they would ultimately achieve their goal of reaching the Great Glacier. But before that, due to the rugged terrain and climate, they were compelled to seek refuge

and rest in the ruins of a fortress that Binsa pointed out to them during a few days. These ruins turned out to be an ancient Aen Ghele elven fortress named [Speur Mara](#), dating back to a time before the Aen Ghele tribalization during the adaptation to the White Frost.

In addition to this, they encountered at least the remnants of another witcher school that had occupied and repurposed the fortress. More specifically, a school consisting solely of female witches, known as the School of the Siren (though technically their medallion depicted a nixa). Sadly, this school could not even last a generation, as Putnam, investigating the ruins, discovered the cause of their demise: a powerful avalanche. This sent shivers down his spine, reminiscent of the near-extinction of the Griffins. Moreover, he found materials that had survived well in the cold, half-destroyed texts related to mutations in female biology, a bestiary of the area, and more.

The texts about mutations in female biology proved to be useful to him, enabling the existence of women in the School of the Crane in the distant future when he would establish the school. However, this achievement was not possible without the studies of [Nasira](#) regarding the subject, Keira Metz's studies derived from trying to find a cure for the Catriona Plague focused on stabilizing the mutation formula for the School of the Lynx, and the assistance of Jabolet, and, of course, Jolanta. With the latter possessing fragments of the formula for mutating women from the School of the Cat, which had been rescued from the fall of Dyn Marv. A notable case stemming from the preservation of these texts from both "parents of the Cranes" was Putnam and Jolanta's future adopted daughter, Halsey "Bo" Pitch.

As for the bestiary, it provided valuable information for the remainder of their journey to the Great Glacier. The information from the partially destroyed book aided them in their confrontation against the monster known as a "gurumapa" by the locals. This creature blocked Putnam and the expedition's path, requiring Putnam to kill it. This ogroid creature was later recognized by Northern Kingdoms scholars as a vital bridge between ogres and giants in the realm of monster taxonomy.

Throughout this leg of their journey, a lingering fear cast its shadow—the possibility of encountering a yeti. However, as fate would have it, a twist of irony awaited them. Ultimately, it was a yeti that would emerge as their unexpected savior, facilitating their triumphant culmination of the expedition and securing their swift and secure return to the Northern Kingdoms.

The Dead Lands (Summer of 1288)

The Great Glacier represented both relief and challenge. Relief, because they had finally reached the northernmost part of the Continent. Now, they only had to reach the coast that Fabio speculated existed, and their journey would be at an end, with only the return remaining. Furthermore, being summer, the temperatures were around freezing, providing respite from the sub-zero temperatures they had endured in the latter part of their journey. However, it also posed a challenge. Arriving in summer meant they had to endure 24 hours of perpetual sunlight—a situation they hadn't expected and which greatly affected them. The constant daylight disrupted their circadian rhythms significantly. Coupled with the fact that they were in a frozen desert stretching as far as the eye could see (even with Putnam's enhanced vision) and the rationing of their food, they succumbed sooner rather than later to the cold, hunger, mirages, and hallucinations.

This situation inevitably condemned them to perish there, if not for being saved once again at the last moment.

Their near-death experience unfolded gradually. As previously mentioned, it began with a lack of sleep. They attempted to remedy this by using spells and Signs to induce sleep, such as Somne, and by rotating shifts to count the hours and stand guard. However, these efforts proved futile as the monotony of the landscape and the 24 hours of full sunlight made it challenging to accurately gauge time, causing miscalculations or complete confusion. Subsequently, they began rationing their dwindling food supplies. The absence of proper sustenance left them increasingly fatigued, and each mirage they encountered spawned false optimism, further beguiling and disorienting them. The culmination of all this was hallucinations brought on by sleep deprivation. The Great Glacier transformed into an authentic white inferno, or as they eventually dubbed it, the "Dead Lands," a place from which they harbored doubts about escaping.

In terms that resonate with the religious convictions of the late 16th-century adherents of Saint Putnam, one could posit that the Great Glacier metamorphosed into a crucible where all, with Putnam at the forefront, would "purge their sins" and emerge as more refined individuals.

The first to fall were the mercenary, Kina, the dwarf Roth (which only deepened the life debt the dwarf owed Putnam), and the historian, Bosco. However, the expedition managed to continue, with Putnam and Eberhatt (in his lycanthropic

form) carrying their unconscious bodies, which remained alive. Next to succumb was Tugdual, whom Eberhatt also carried, but with greater effort. Following him was Democritus, the mage, who met his end after stripping naked and running off, believing he had spotted hot springs. The remaining members tried to stop him, insisting that there were no hot springs and that it was a product of hallucinations or mirages, but they were unable to prevent him from doing so. They never saw him again.

To conclude with Jabolet, their progress was brought to a halt as they could no longer carry any more bodies, at least not without completely exhausting themselves and succumbing to the harsh conditions. They attempted to establish a makeshift camp, but it remained incomplete due to their state, and the rest of the group gradually followed suit, as if yielding to an inevitable fate. After Jabolet, it was Istredd's turn. He clung to the furs he had with all his strength, tears streaming down his face, while a single name escaped his lips before he closed his eyes—Yennefer. Following Istredd, Eberhatt, Fabio, and finally (excluding Putnam's dog, Frey), Putnam himself succumbed. Just like the others, various hallucinations, hunger, and cold took hold of him until he could bear it no longer.

Initially, auditory hallucinations besieged Putnam, voices from his past clamoring for attention—especially those of the departed. Tubiel's voice emerged prominently, urging him to surrender, promising a reunion that would bring him the sought-after peace, an end to his ceaseless quest. These were followed by gradually intensifying visual and auditory illusions, which gradually took on tactile and gustatory forms. D'yaeb'l "materialized," seemingly only to taunt him, questioning whether this death held more value than dying by her blade or in the company of her in the Tuyotuki Islands, bidding farewell with a tender kiss on his lips. Putnam wrestled with discerning reality from illusion, but ultimately reached the conclusion that D'yaeb'l, deceased, could not be present.

The subsequent phase of his brush with death introduced olfactory hallucinations. Suddenly, the aroma of hot food—specifically, the fare from Marina's tavern—filled his senses. Mustering great effort, he rose and embarked on an unceasing march across the Great Glacier, driven by the quest for sustenance. Yet, he eventually succumbed, realizing his mind had deceived him, after he fell to the ground. A respectable demise for a witcher, lacking the spectacle of being killed by vampires, but dignified, he thought as he comprehended his inability to stand, only being able to turn himself around.

Ever faithful, Frey, the loyal tuyotukian dog, trailed him, vigilant against any reckless act that Putnam may comit, ready to share the ultimate fate of his master if need be. The subsequent phase of his brush with death introduced olfactory hallucinations. Suddenly, the aroma of hot food—specifically, the fare from Marina's tavern—filled his senses. Mustering great effort, he rose and embarked on an unceasing march across the Great Glacier, driven by the quest for sustenance. Yet, he eventually succumbed, realizing his mind had deceived him. A respectable demise for a witcher, lacking the spectacle of being killed by vampires, but dignified, he thought as he comprehended his inability to stand, only being able to turn himself around. Ever faithful, Frey, the loyal tuyotukian dog, trailed him, vigilant against any reckless act that Putnam may comit, ready to share the ultimate fate of his master if need be.

The final wave of hallucinations, akin to Death herself arriving in a most soothing guise, amalgamated all preceding experiences. Primarily olfactory, followed by visual, auditory, and even tactile sensations of Jolanta. She appeared radiant, moving Putnam to tears as he had never wept before, eclipsing even the sorrow of Tubiel's passing. His tears, borne from a blend of contrition for his errors and the dormant emotions he harbored for her, flowed freely. Jolanta—more accurately, her hallucinatory projection—enveloped him in an embrace, providing assurance that she comprehended his choices, and all would ultimately be well, that no wrongdoing occurred. While this deviated from Jolanta's customary demeanor, hinting at its illusory nature, Putnam brushed aside such distinctions. And thus, he readied himself for the inevitable end upon that frozen expanse. As Putnam at last reached the nadir of his endurance, he sealed his eyes, anticipating the embrace of death to finally sweep him away.

And then, the "miracle" occurred. However, to better grasp this, we must briefly revisit Novigrad. Do you recall the pedophile network that Jolanta dismantled? Well, rumors and whispers suggest that the hierarch of Novigrad, Cyrus Engelkind Hemmelfart, had struck a pact with the enigmatic Gaunter O'Dimm to secure the position he held. Jolanta, by killing him, unknowingly did Gaunter a favor by expediting the moment when Cyrus's soul was due. Furthermore, Gaunter was in competition for this soul with another rival, another "merchant" with whom he had made a wager. In this instance, Gaunter emerged as the victor. So it appears that the (speculated) Cosmic Horror / Entity owed him a favor, and he remained a being of his word against all odds.

Naturally, as he approached Jolanta in a tavern and their conversation unfolded,

she gradually dismissed him as a madman who believed he could grant wishes. Nonetheless, this did not dissuade Gaunter; since Jolanta played along, hoping he would fulfill the "wish" he owed her and then depart, leaving her in peace. It is said that Gaunter offered her three fundamental human wishes—fame, fortune, and power—along with a mysterious fourth one.

Jolanta rejected the first three options. "Fame?" She had plenty of reputation, albeit a mixed one, and if greater fame meant more travel and enduring bards' songs about her Putnam's love life, then that was a no-go. "Fortune?" After dismantling the pedophile network, she had not only been paid well but had also seized considerable assets. In fact, she could finally buy Crippled Kate's brothel next to her home in the Glory District, expanding her residence and sparing herself from the presence of both prostitutes and their clients. "Power?" She had zero interest in delving into politics beyond what the Redanian Secret Service might offer her as a job. So, she opted for the fourth, without considering the consequences it would entail (fortunately, these turned out positive). The fourth wish was for "something she secretly desired but didn't know."

Following this, Gaunter is said to have smiled, clapping his hands three times, and what followed was the sound of a tremendous blizzard in summer from outside, prompting everyone to glance out the window to see what was happening, only to realize that no adverse weather phenomenon had occurred. By the time Jolanta went to ask Gaunter what had transpired, after glancing suspiciously at her drink, wondering if she had been drugged, he had simply vanished without a trace. After the encounter, Jolanta returned home to rest and just as she was climbing the stairs, she felt a sudden wave of relief, as if she knew that something was now right, unlike before. As she was ascending the stairs, she felt a sudden wave of relief, as if she knew that something was now right, unlike before. It was a peculiar sensation, but she didn't dwell on it.

Turning our focus back to the Far North, it was precisely after Jolanta experienced this feeling that Putnam, Frey, and the expedition members who were at the half-finished camp suddenly vanished and were transported to another part of the Great Glacier, close to a cave where a yeti resided. The yeti had emerged from its abode to fish and stumbled upon them, ultimately saving their lives at the last possible moment. Just a bit longer, and they all would have perished.

And though unknown to both at that moment and afterward, it was curious how their destinies intersected, even though separated by such a vast distance, as if a

distant echo were beckoning them. For Jolanta's subconscious wish "that Putnam would be well despite everything" would prove pivotal in his salvation and that of the other members of the expedition. Not to mention, of course, the yeti.

The duration they spent unconscious under the vigilant care of the yeti, who turned out to be quite the opposite of the mythological clichés attributed by nordlings, was indeterminate. The only clichés that held true were its white fur, ogroid features, its dwelling in a "cave," and its height, although it wasn't as tall, measuring roughly the size of the deceased Zivor. All they knew was that it was still summer when they awoke, or at least summer as understood in the Great Glacier, which meant six months of constant sunlight.

The first to wake up was Istredd, who was surprised to learn not only that they had survived, but also how kind and clever their savior was and how beautiful his cave house was. As is obvious, the yeti did not speak Common but Elder Speech, more specifically the Aen Ghele dialect, which fortunately did not vary much from standard Elder Speech. So, sooner rather than later, Istredd and the yeti got to talking, bringing the yeti, who by the way, was named Sharrunni, up to speed with the mage on what had happened and becoming good friends. They embarked on philosophical discussions, traversing history and a variety of other topics as the others were recovering. Istredd took notes of everything he could, as he felt as ignorant with the yeti (all in a good way) as when he was under Roedskilde's tutelage in his younger years.

Sharrunni even fixed the parestisomach that Istredd had taken on the expedition and with which he had been taking pictures from time to time, as no painting would do justice to what they had experienced so far. The parestisomach had broken due to the cold.

The second to awaken was Eberhatt, followed by Roth, who, although he didn't dislike Sharrunni, found him a bit dull (he actually felt envious of his cave house, but that's a story for another time). The mercenary and the historian were the next to wake up, followed by Tugdual, and finally Putnam, who, due to the folly of leaving the camp half-done, had suffered more. Apart from the sleep problems he was already experiencing (which had improved but were still present), it seemed as if he needed more rest. Sharrunni assured them that he was fine and that he would wake up sooner rather than later, he was sure. And while this reassured the rest of the expedition, they couldn't help but worry about his condition, especially Frey, Fabio, Istredd, and Kina on behalf of Brynn,

seeing that everyone was awake except him.

Their concern was somewhat alleviated only when Putnam began to move and talk in his sleep, which was an indication that he would wake up a few days later. And thanks to Frey, it must be said, who, seeing the improvement, was encouraged to try waking his master with licks after several unsuccessful attempts.

Putnam's initial reaction upon waking and seeing the yeti was to attempt to defend himself, as he believed it might attack him. However, upon realizing he was naked, he became surprised and attempted to locate his belongings with his gaze. Istredd took advantage of the moment to intervene and reassure him that everyone was fine and that, in fact, the yeti had been their savior, and there was no need to defend himself or cause harm. Putnam, trusting the mage's word and confirming the well-being of everyone as he saw them, began to relax and catch up while eating and regaining strength, along with the rest of the expedition and their host. As days went by in Sharrunni's home, Putnam's strength gradually returned. The camaraderie between the expedition members and the yeti deepened, their conversations a multitude of subjects. Sharrunni, whose initial appearance had been perceived with apprehension, was now regarded as a friend and a font of wisdom.

Through Istredd's skillful translation, the exchange of ideas and gratitude flowed. Putnam thanked Sharrunni for his life-saving intervention, to which the yeti humbly responded that it was simply the right thing to do. Life on the Great Glacier was lonely, as there weren't many of them left, not because humans or other races had nearly driven them to extinction, but because they themselves, the yetis, had done so during the peak of their civilization. Sharrunni's gratitude for the companionship and the opportunity to impart his wisdom on the humans was heartfelt, urging them to avoid repeating the mistakes of his people and to share these teachings with their fellow humans to prevent the collapse of another civilization.

In the midst of these discussions, time passed until Putnam had fully regained his health. Yet, an inevitable question loomed, one that had been sidestepped for fear of offending their gracious host: How could they find their way back home? The mages couldn't open portals, as, aside from climatic factors, the area was too far from the Northern Realms, which would lead to portal malfunctions. Although portals were undeniably useful, they only covered a specific range. Therefore, attempting to open one in the Great Glacier could result in disaster,

with the threat of potentially being even more catastrophic than the typical outcome of losing a limb due to portal instability.

To everyone's surprise, the yeti responded without being offended that if they wanted to return to the Northern Realms, he could take them with the Aen Ghele. They weren't exactly the friendliest "neighbors" in the world, but if anyone had the ability to get them home without having to make the perilous journey back, it was them.

Among the Glacier Folk

Sharrunni had told them about going to the Aen Ghele for a simple reason. Despite tribalizing to survive the White Frost, they possessed as much knowledge as their cousins from other elven groups, such as the Aen Seidhe and the Aen Elle, to name a couple of examples. Since tribalization didn't imply becoming savage; it simply meant choosing a simpler way of life for various reasons and becoming more integrated with nature. In the case of the Aen Ghele, it was to survive an impending catastrophe, because they didn't believe that Zirael had eradicated the White Frost; they thought she had merely postponed its arrival in their world and sooner or later, this phenomenon would ravage their world. From a certain perspective, they were correct, as there were still threats that could freeze the world and rob it of all life. However, that's a discussion for another time. Therefore, Sharrunni was confident that they would have at least an Aen Saevherne among them, who, with their magical expertise, could address the issue of distance and return them home if they managed to convince them. This would be the most challenging part of the whole affair.

So, once Sharrunni did them the additional favor of retrieving their belongings from the half-finished camp, and all members of the expedition felt strong enough to journey to the Aen Ghele, they set off through a series of interconnected caves from the yeti's home in search of this isolationist group of elves. The journey took them several days, precisely four, with stops only for meals and proper rest, avoiding the sleep troubles they had experienced upon arrival at the Great Glacier. To solve this, they used a device provided by Sharrunni that accurately calculated the hours of the day (and consequently, the hours of sleep).

After four days with their four nights (though the latter were only calculated), they finally found traces of the Aen Ghele, and the expedition and the yeti parted ways. While the expedition tried to persuade Sharrunni to help them interact

with the Aen Ghele, he told them he couldn't, and his assistance ended there. He didn't have a bad relationship with the Aen Ghele, but it wasn't perfect. It was more of a tense respect that could turn violent at any moment if not for the occasional trade between the elves and him, exchanging things of mutual interest (hence Sharrunni's knowledge of Elder Speech). However, he was sure they would manage well on their own and could return home without a problem. While the yeti wasn't entirely wrong in this belief, it turned out to be a half-truth rather than the whole truth.

The first contact with the Aen Ghele, while not as violent as with the people of Mazheva, was still complicated. It began when they attempted to speak with the first Aen Ghele they encountered, who fled with their people upon seeing that they were human Nordlings. Through the Aen Saevherne they possessed, the Aen Ghele were aware of the dire situation their Aen Seidhe cousins were facing in the Northern Realms. This Aen Ghele then returned with a small group, comprised of several druids, who attacked the expedition. Despite the mages in the group defending the other expedition members well, they were defeated with overwhelming ease, ending up captured and rendered unconscious in the process. They were subsequently brought before the Aen Ghele king to explain their presence and intentions.

By the time they regained consciousness, they were truly within Aen Ghele territory, not just on its outskirts, and they were imprisoned. Confined within what appeared to be bars of ice or a similar substance. Putnam attempted to use Igni to melt the bars but found no success. However, their confinement didn't last long as Aen Ghele soldiers soon arrived to shackle them and lead them to the king. In doing so, they gained a better view of how these elves lived and what their kingdom was like.

Similar to Sharrunni's cave home, the underground kingdom of the Aen Ghele was elegant, but even more refined. This isn't to say that Sharrunni's dwelling was ugly in comparison, not at all, but there was a noticeable difference between the more squared architecture of the yeti, reminiscent of dwarves, and that of the Aen Ghele. The latter possessed a perfect blend of beauty, harmony, and integration with the environment, a hallmark of elven design. In their case, this integration was even more pronounced due to their living in the singular environment that was the Great Glacier, unlike their Aen Seidhe or Aen Nílfé cousins who lived in more habitable zones.

They weren't treated as harshly as they had anticipated, but rather in a tough

manner. It was evident that they were not trusted in the slightest. The Aen Ghele had tolerated the presence of a certain group, on one occasion, mainly because a golden dragoness was among them. Istredd spoke on behalf of the rest of the expedition most of the time due to the inability of the others to speak Elder Speech, but the situation didn't improve much. It wasn't until the Aen Ghele princess, Veejovva, entered the scene and recognized Putnam's medallion that things began to change. She had lived with the Ryvlyn of Sanzode group during their time among the Aen Ghele, a group respected both by the golden dragoness they had within the group, and by the elven ally they had made. Veejova had been impressed by the kindness and respect they had shown, and she wanted to believe that another member of the Griffin Guild, along with their friends and allies, would be just as honorable as Ryvlyn and his group.

Fortunately for everyone, Veejovva's belief proved true. However, her father and other members of the Royal Court remained skeptical. They still regarded the princess's father as having been overly permissive with Ryvlyn and her friends in the past. This viewpoint continued to cause disputes among the Aen Ghele nobility and gradually undermined the king's authority among the various elven clans that comprised their society.

While progress had been made, it remained limited, leaving the expedition members at a crossroads concerning their fate and still struggling to find a path back home. The Aen Ghele were burdened with a fear that exposing their existence could attract the Nordling expansionism, resulting in their annihilation. For this apprehension, the group found themselves incarcerated once more, spending several days confined until they were once again summoned before the king. After extensive deliberation, a decision was reached, one heavily influenced by the king's daughter, it should be noted. She held a steadfast belief in Putnam's integrity, akin to Ryvlyn's, and also harbored a crush on the witcher.

The verdict unfolded thus: They were granted the opportunity to return to the Northern Realms under three stringent conditions. First and foremost, they were prohibited from revealing the Aen Ghele's existence; any violation would trigger a pursuit by the elven sages, leading to the death of all expedition members (and the sages could ascertain if they had revealed their existence to the nordlings or not easily). Second, their departure was contingent on their assistance in resolving the various problems plaguing the Aen Ghele, a task designed to cultivate trust between the two groups. Third, the witcher was tasked with serving as the princess's bodyguard, ensuring her secure navigation through the

subterranean kingdom.

The acceptance of these terms was swift, borne out of a genuine desire to return to the Northern Kingdoms. Among the expedition members, Putnam's decision was the most deliberative, yet he eventually agreed to the role of the princess's guardian, influenced by peer pressure, despite his reservations (for he would have preferred to help with the Aen Ghele problems).

The rest of the expedition members were assigned unpleasant or dangerous tasks by the Aen Ghele. These tasks included dealing with ice trolls, clearing rubble, cleaning up the waste of snow leopards, and similar duties. The king took advantage of this to keep his allies with magical abilities close, as his paranoia about being overthrown (as had happened with Auberon in Tir ná Lia) grew with each passing day. After Ryvlyn's visit in 1270 and the defeat of the Wild Hunt two years later, Aen Ghele society had gradually become more polarized, reaching a complicated point. There was a growing fear that his reign would soon come to an end, and that a puppet ruler might replace him, or a new dynasty with a more radical stance towards other races could emerge through a coup or regicide. This new ruler might attempt to subjugate, destroy, or enslave others in revenge for Eredin and his men's defeat, supposedly in defense of their Aen Seidhe cousins. He could despise humans, but on the other hand, he didn't want bloodshed for both sides.

For this reason, although he had originally considered turning to the witcher to solve the minor problems they had, he chose not to. Instead, he assigned him as the protector of his daughter. While the young woman was capable of defending herself, having a witcher by her side would be beneficial in case things turned sour. After all, if a witcher had defeated Imlerith and subsequently Eredin, it was clear that they were a suitable type of "warrior" to accompany her on the mission she had.

Veejovva's strength lay not so much in physical prowess, but in diplomacy. She intended to assess the situation while traveling throughout the kingdom and negotiate new agreements with the different clans that would prevent the potential overthrow of her father, a concern of which she was aware, as they had a very close relationship. This made him trust Veejovva and her intuition when she told him that the new Griffin seemed to be as honorable as the one who had visited them before.

Communication with Putnam fortunately wasn't an issue. Veejovva spoke

Common, albeit somewhat roughly, learned from her time with Ryvlyn, who had taught her the language. Additionally, the fact that Putnam and Ryvlyn knew each other made their relationship shift from being overly formal to becoming a friendship fairly quickly. This was beneficial for both of them, as they would spend many hours together.

Physically, the princess was insanely beautiful, although obviously not reaching the levels of Enid an Glenna, better known as Francesca Findabair in the Northern Kingdoms. Taller than Putnam, who stood at around 6'3.6", she measured about 6'10.7" in height (something that Putnam found amusing, since a bodyguard is typically at least the height of their charge, but he didn't comment on it), with snow-white hair (including her eyebrows) like snow, purple eyes, and pale, almost bluish skin—something common among Aen Ghele royalty. This caught Putnam's attention and would influence his decision to have a relationship with Aine two years later, rather than just a one-night stand. Despite its apparent insignificance, this would be another cornerstone for what would come after and the future foundation of the School of the Crane.

It would be during this time that Veejovva dealt with all of that, their romance would blossom due to the significant time they spent together and the elf's predisposition. Fortunately, Putnam didn't have to do much in the political intricacies, mostly just appearing tough and staring intently to intimidate when necessary, as the attacks were more verbal than physical. He acted more as a caretaker for the princess's snow leopard, which also accompanied them, a food and drink taster to check for poison, and a companion who offered advice from an entirely external perspective, rather than a traditional protector or bodyguard.

However, this is not to suggest that there weren't more "physical" dangers. During their journey through Aen Ghele territory, Putnam found himself in a few confrontations, primarily against ice trolls and what he humorously dubbed "albino shaelmaars." Yet, these instances could be counted on one hand.

Being the greatest challenge that Veejovva faced in her political adventure dealing with the Aen Elle refugees in the territory. These were warriors from the Wild Hunt who had survived the events in Undvik and had marched into their territory in search of a new home due to their inability to return to their native world. The problem was that, after so many years, they hadn't integrated and, along with the more bellicose factions of Aen Ghele society, they were radicalizing many and pushing the society towards internal conflict if their policy

of extermination and enslavement against other races wasn't accepted.

Expel them? No, they couldn't, at least not in a hasty manner. It wouldn't be dignified, and it would only validate their wrong perception that the king was 'weak,' that he was too 'humanized' (and that wasn't positive in that context), making the situation worse. They had to convince them, change their mindset somehow, and if there was no other choice, then yes, expel them. It was a complicated situation, and Putnam didn't know how to advise her. So, he chose to remain silent for a while, until he finally realized something and mentioned it to the elf.

From his perspective, the reason for radicalization was simple. They had lost their purpose, which had led them to become entrenched in their beliefs and become extremists. If it wasn't too late, they could win back the Aen Ghele who had been swayed by them. But for that to happen, they would have to show that the Aen Elle present there were changing radically. To achieve this, he believed that they should be given a new purpose within the society. Initially yielding a bit, then gradually transforming them without them realizing it, and letting them see for themselves the mistakes they were falling into. To better explain his idea, Putnam used an example: his intense debates with Jolanta about morality due to their different upbringings, which always ended without either of them yielding, only reinforcing their existing beliefs. Besides that, he missed her a lot sometimes.

Lecturing them wouldn't do any good (as he had done so many times with the feline), it would only worsen the problem already at hand and force a choice between the two most extreme options. However, understanding them, without yielding excessively, so that the other party also had to compromise, might lead to a middle ground and potentially change things. Something that, sadly, was impossible in the Northern Realms between the Scoia'tael and humans.

This did not mean to be neutral, and to consider, that evil, whether lesser or greater, was evil. On the contrary, it was about opening a new path that would minimize the effects of both lesser and greater evils. The goal was to make the impact of both almost negligible. In this case, the lesser evil, which would involve expelling the Aen Elle and their radical Aen Ghele allies, would likely only lead to further radicalization, potentially forming bands that would terrorize the different populations of the Far North. The greater evil, fully conceding to their demands, would only result in unnecessary death and destruction, putting them on par with the Nordling humans.

Establishing this approach would require a delicate balance between firmness and understanding. Veejovva knew that she couldn't allow the radicalization to continue, but she also understood that she couldn't dismiss the Aen Elle refugees without exhausting all options. She decided to take Putnam's suggestion seriously and began working on a plan to redefine the role of the Aen Elle refugees and their radical Aen Ghele allies in society. She aimed to understand their perspective, pinpoint where their vision fell short, and then bring about change in a way that wasn't abrupt, even allowing for a degree of self-critique among the other part.

Realizing that all of this stemmed from fear, particularly the fear of losing what had made them "great," Veejovva considered the possibility of giving the warriors of the Wild Hunt and their Aen Ghele allies the purpose of defending their people, which could potentially bring about a positive transformation. She even contemplated the idea of "deceiving" them, leading them to come into contact with the powerful silver dragons. Perhaps these dragons, with their wisdom, could help them realize the error of their ways after failed hunting expeditions against them, especially if circumstances didn't improve. And indeed, this turned out to be the case (thankfully without having to actually involve the silver dragons), as they were truly lost.

By assigning them the purpose of defending their people from threats even more dire than humans, the Aen Elle gradually integrated into their new society, while the Aen Ghele radicals found themselves being welcomed back into their society without considering themselves a separate group. Through this process, they relinquished their radical ideology of expansion and dominance, eventually becoming a part of the larger community once again. They came to understand how their new/old society had entrusted them with a crucial task, allowing them to see the value of integration. This caused, for example, the Aen Ghele radicals to perceive the more isolationist Aen Ghele as equals rather than cowards. On the part of the warriors of the Wild Hunt, this transformation led them to shift their role from oppressors to defenders of their kind. This change aligned better with their original beliefs but without the extreme aspects, and it ultimately allowed them to redeem themselves by defending their newfound people without seeking to exterminate or subjugate any real or potential threats.

This, along with the completed tasks and interactions of the other expedition members with the Aen Ghele, earned them enough trust, with even the Aen Ghele giving nicknames to all members of the expedition, with Putnam being

nicknamed An Greamdoir Gynvael (*Translated: The Ice Breaker*), for the work he had done alongside the princess in "breaking the ice" in a divided society that could now come together once again, to finally be taken before one of the Elven Sages and returned home through a portal. This also meant that Putnam had to part ways with Veejovva, but as with other times, while painful, it wasn't as heart-wrenching. He had accepted the transient nature of their connection and cherished it to the fullest, hoping that what they had shared had left a positive impact on her, and vice versa. He had come to fully understand that the essence of relationships lay not in what they constantly provided during their time of existence, but in what they left behind and how it contributed to each person's growth along their individual paths. Though the idea of journeying a shared path with someone until the end of their days wasn't unwelcome either. Deep down, he still harbored the desire to fulfill the once-foiled dream he shared with Tubiel — to be like the cranes he had observed, soaring through the skies and seas of the world accompanied, both in the good and the bad. And who knows, maybe not just metaphorically speaking.

Nonetheless, that was a far-off prospect, about 93 years away to be precise. He still had much to live and experience before he could give himself to another person as they deserved. But if there's one positive thing to be said, it's that he was getting closer to achieving it. He could sense, not just see, the fruits reaped throughout the long journey he had traveled both literally and mentally.

After the expedition to the Far North (1288 - 1290)

After their return to the Northern Kingdoms, the group went their separate ways, though they remained in touch through letters, especially Fabio, Istredd, Eberhatt, and Putnam, who were very close to each other. Each of them resumed their respective occupations: Eberhatt returned to the clinic, Putnam continued his work as a witcher, Istredd delved into archaeological excavations and pursued academic endeavors, while Fabio, after reporting to the Koviri Crown and allocating the expedition's earnings to each member, relished life with his family. Despite this, he didn't forsake his passion for cartography, drawing up a more or less accurate map of what lay beyond the nordling and nilfgaardian territories, although he temporarily set aside exploration until his children grew older.

During this period, spanning the 1290s, Fabio welcomed the birth of his other daughters and son,

with Putnam being named godfather to his children, and his only son also being named after the witcher. Concurrently, he persisted in publishing numerous works detailing the expeditions conducted in both the Far East (some of which he had already published) and the Far North. During this time, the merchant company known as "The Company" would also come into existence, founded by Fabio's brother, Luis. Initially starting as a small maritime merchant company with just three ships in its fleet, it would eventually become one of the most significant players in the industry. Playing a crucial role in voyages between the Continent and the Western Continent, which was still undiscovered in that time. Also becoming the source of most income of the future Crane Witchers.

It is also said that during this time, Alanna and Putnam had a tense reencounter, with her already having become a Lady Knight, but this is not known for certain, as it is more a part of the legend of Saint Putnam than anything else.

During this time, Putnam also passed through Novigrad to find Jolanta and have a conversation (as well as retrieve some of his clothing he had left behind when he abandoned her). Fabio was taking a long break from his expeditions, and perhaps due to this, Putnam thought they could be together again. However, just as he was about to knock on her door, he changed his mind at the last moment and walked away. Not before finding a new contract in the city that would lead him to the city of Carreras. There, he would serve as the bodyguard of the king of the new Temerian Crown dynasty during a diplomatic meeting between Temeria and Zerrikania being held in that city. It was in Carreras that his past would revisit him in various forms, including Anika and Keira. Even the future would make an important appearance in the form of Nasira Faizan.

And what happened to Kovir and the Far North region? Well, Kovir expanded its trade routes, consequently increasing the profits for its bourgeoisie and the kingdom (though not to the extent of Lyria & Rivia with the Far East). As for the Far North, it began to be visited more by the nordlings, particularly the Duchy of Vinland, and to a much lesser extent, Kwanland and Kvenland.

Convergences (End of August - Beginning of September 1288)

"Ah, Anika, grab a mug and settle in for the saga of my recent escapades! So, picture this: yours truly, bravely battling monsters that could turn even the fiercest nightmares into mere bedtime tales. And then there's Fabio, my partner in shenanigans (well, not quite literally), whom I've rescued from more self-inflicted disasters than my tally can handle. Love, my dear friend, has been quite the game,

I must confess. I've waltzed through the dance of affection a few times, had a dramatic reunion, and a not-so-dramatic parting with my ex, Jolanta. What a woman she is! I should introduce you someday – that is, if she doesn't tries to kill me first of course. And oh, the pièce de résistance? Navigating the bone-chilling grip of frigid weather. Just your everyday, typical witcher life, you know."

—Putnam to Anika during their reencounter in Carreras

After several days of travel, Putnam finally arrived in the city of Carreras and met with the emissary of the Temerian Crown who had posted the offer. The emissary provided a detailed explanation of the contract secured in Novigrad, outlining Putnam's responsibilities, the duration of the assignment, palace etiquette he needed to adhere to, and other relevant details. It's worth noting that although other candidates had applied for the bodyguard position, Putnam was chosen due to his unique condition. Seizing this opportunity, he negotiated for better pay than the originally promised 500 orens, successfully securing 1500 orens. This was a substantial sum that would prove invaluable, especially considering his ongoing issues with his bank account at the Zammorto Bank.

The task was relatively straightforward: to safeguard the king during the signing of a trade treaty with Zerrikania who would be celebrated in the palace offered by a local count – a diplomatic meeting of utmost importance – and the ensuing celebration if the treaty proved successful. While not the most glamorous job, Putnam recognized his need for funds and thus accepted the assignment.

Despite more than a decade having passed since the historical era known as the *Iron Judgment* in Nordling history, the echoes of that period of Radovid V's reign continued to reverberate. And if there was one trait that characterized the Redanian monarch, aside from his well-documented flaws and baldness, it was his unyielding tenacity and boundless ambition. From the perspective of Temeria, there remained no doubt that, despite past setbacks, Radovid's insatiable drive would inevitably lead him to reclaim his mantle as the "*Protector of the North*." So, renewed attempts to annex neighboring kingdoms were expected sooner or later.

Furthermore, the potential trade treaty with Zerrikania held the promise of significant advantages for Temeria, potentially elevating the kingdom from its current weakened state. This prospect garnered staunch support from both the aristocracy and Temeria's Intelligence Service. However, they were also convinced that Radovid would vehemently oppose such progress, given his vested interest in perpetuating Temeria's vulnerability for his own political gains.

This had also been the reason why Temeria had called upon observers from other realms, under the pretext of ensuring there were no traps or misunderstandings. In reality, it was to gather forces from different kingdoms in the area to defend it in the event of a Redanian attack, as the chosen fortress city for the meeting would be even more protected. This would include various intelligence services, which could prevent an assassination if that was another of the Redanian monarch's plans. With the Temerian military still recovering and the kingdom's finances strained, hiring mercenaries from Kovir was financially infeasible and thus not a viable defense strategy.

It was this very circumstance that would unexpectedly reunite Anika, Keira, and Putnam after an eleven-year hiatus. Anika would attend the treaty signing as an observer on behalf of Kaedwen, while Keira would be part of Temeria's new court, having returned to her role as an advisor after gaining the new king's trust by demonstrating advancements in a cure for the Catriona Plague. Disenchanted with life in the School of the Lynx caravan and the increasingly toxic nature of her relationship with Lambert, Keira sought the luxuries she once enjoyed.

As for Nasira, her position was relatively straightforward. Following the overthrow of the Zerrikanian sorceress queen earlier that year, Nasira returned to her advisory role under the new queen's reign. Representing Zerrikania, she came to Temeria as the queen's delegate to sign the treaty, accompanied by a witcher named Teirgh from the School of the Manticore. Putnam would form a certain camaraderie with Teirgh, albeit not as deep as his bond with Adalwulf.

It's worth clarifying that Anika and Putnam's reencounter did not occur at the treaty signing itself but slightly earlier. Faced with the need for money to buy an appropriate suit of armor for the event, Putnam sought employment. He found work in the sewers, a reliable haunt for a witcher. His tasks mainly revolved around investigating the disappearances of guards and maintenance workers, as well as responding to reports of monster attacks along the Ismena River. While his work yielded little beyond encounters with typical sewer denizens, a notable exception was a colossal crocodile, a menacing creature that had originated from a Zangvebarian merchant's misadventures who was in the area long time ago and lost his pet.

It would be after this that Anika and Putnam would reunite. The witcher was taking longer than expected to finish the contract that was assigned to him, and the sorceress, fueled by the fascination with monsters that would lead her to the

foundation of the School of the Gyrfalcon in the distant future, set out to find him upon learning of a witcher in the city. She recognized him by the description that the guards had given of his eyes and did so as a favor to them. Fortunately, she found him emerging from the sewers, quite soiled but otherwise unharmed.

The sight of Anika was a heartwarming surprise for Putnam. Their bond, forged during the curse of Prince Guiscard, had been akin to that of an older brother and a younger sister. Reuniting after so many years and finding her alive and well filled him with joy. Initially, Putnam did not recognize her due to the changes time had wrought in her appearance, including the usual magical surgery typical of sorceresses. It was only upon catching a whiff of her perfume that he realized her identity. His pleasure at seeing her was evident; he had always seen promise in her and appreciated her unique qualities even amidst his prior skepticism towards mages. In some ways, she reminded him of Istredd, and her subsequent growth validated his judgment. Anika, in turn, found comfort in his presence, having fond memories of Putnam's guidance during the course of the curse.

Following their unexpected reunion, Anika and Putnam reminisced, catching up on each other's lives while Putnam was collecting his reward. But witnessing Putnam's disappointment over the meager payment he had received for his sewer contract, Anika graciously offered to cover the costs of a comfortable inn, a rejuvenating bath, and even assistance in procuring the elegant armor he desired. Putnam initially resisted, deeming it unnecessary, but Anika's persistence and genuine concern prevailed. He eventually accepted her kindness, promising to repay her someday in the future.

Utilizing her connections, Anika managed to secure a highly coveted item that had been a long-held aspiration of Putnam's – the legendary Raven's armor. Presenting this cherished gift to him before the event's commencement, Putnam was awestruck by the sight of the fabled armor, an almost mythical artifact. In that moment, he made a solemn vow to Anika and himself – to wear the Raven's armor with honor and reverence, embodying the legacy it represented.

Raven's armor indeed became Putnam's signature attire, accompanying him faithfully for nearly two years. Its symbolism endured until the day he chose to leave it behind at Kaer Seren, adding it to the collection of relics within the School of the Griffin during the winter of 1289.

The initial phase of the event followed the anticipated formalities, steeped in tradition and marked by a sense of tedium. Putnam's potential ennui was offset

by Anika's presence by his side and the serendipitous reencounter with Keira. Keira's irrepressible eccentricity injected a sense of intrigue into the proceedings, keeping Putnam engaged and preventing boredom from setting in. Remarkably, Keira remained largely unchanged, resembling the individual Putnam had interacted with in 1277. This realization, seen through the lens of time, brought him genuine contentment. Yet, during this phase of the event, Putnam managed to resist succumbing to Keira's flirtatious banter.

The subsequent second part of the event proved to be more challenging. Since a series of mysterious assassinations targeting key figures cast a somber shadow over the festivity, transforming what was meant to be a celebration into a tragedy and a perplexing enigma that demanded everyone's attention.

However, before these unfortunate developments unfolded, it's worth noting that the initial part of the celebration went off without a hitch – though perhaps somewhat overly formal, it was undeniably more engaging than the treaty signing. With Putnam diligently safeguarding the king and Anika playing the role of a supportive confidante, helping Putnam navigate social interactions, the event progressed. Anika's familiarity with high society facilitated Putnam to make connections among attendees. An important contact that Putnam established was Nasira, who would hold significant importance for the future School of the Crane due to her research on more stable witcher mutations in women. Nasira and Anika's preexisting rapport eased the interaction between Putnam and her. In the aftermath, Putnam and Nasira maintained regular correspondence, with Putnam sending her copies of recovered texts from the defunct School of the Siren of the Far North, while also kept her updated on Keira's progress in refining the Catriona Plague cure, hopeful that these contributions would support Nasira's endeavors.

Regarding Keira, their existing acquaintance facilitated a more fluid interaction. Their playful banter, with Putnam reciprocating Keira's flirtations, brought a sense of levity amidst the unfolding events – until the assassinations shattered the atmosphere.

Following the disturbing turn of events and the subsequent halt in festivities, interrogations commenced. It was implausible that someone had simply breached the tight security measures in place. Thus, there had to be a mole. Among the attendees, Nasira, Keira, Teirgh, Putnam, and Anika volunteered to conduct interrogations and resolve the situation. Keira and Putnam represented Temeria, Nasira and Teirgh represented the other party – Zerrikania – while Anika

acted as a "neutral observer" in case the incident was somehow orchestrated by either of the two sides involved in the trade agreement for any reason.

With the group thus divided into three, Nasira and Teirgh took charge of the interrogations to uncover the mole. Keira assumed Putnam's role in safeguarding the monarch (as investigating murders wasn't her strong suit), while Putnam and Anika worked to determine the whereabouts of the assassin or assassins and apprehend them. Initially, Putnam argued that his duty was to protect the Temerian king, as specified in his contract. However, the monarch himself ordered him to handle the investigation, reassuring him that Keira could temporarily take over without issue.

And so, Anika and Putnam embarked on their investigation. They were led to the scene where the bodies had been discovered – none other than the latrines. A most undignified place to meet one's end, yet remarkably suitable for carrying out an assassination.

Nasira and Teirgh for their part, quickly identified the mole – a high-ranking member of the Temerian Intelligence Service who chose to end their own life using a poison known as cantarella, thwarting any further interrogation. Faced with the limitations of not being able to employ necromancy, Nasira and Teirgh ventured outside to examine the potential points of entry for the assassins. They meticulously searched for any clues that might lead them to the culprits, but their efforts proved futile. Whoever had committed the murders had been astute enough to cover their tracks effectively. Thus, after an exhaustive sweep of the area, Nasira and Teirgh reluctantly returned to the group.

Now, the situation rested squarely in the hands of Anika and Putnam. They divided their task of uncovering the mastermind behind the killings based on the bodies found. Anika conducted a thorough examination of the corpses, while Putnam analyzed the blood traces, hoping to trace them back to the killer or killers. Unfortunately, Putnam's efforts hit a dead end as the sample was contaminated due to the shock the bodies' discovery had caused among those who found them.

It wasn't until Anika, as sharp as ever, discovered a piece of metal while removing the clothing from the corpses and examining them closely. As she handed it over to Putnam upon his return, he realized, upon analyzing the depth of the wounds and the cut, that it was caused by a Redanian dagger. This revelation confirmed that the killer or killers were at least affiliated with that

kingdom.

Armed with this lead, they returned to the group to share their findings and engaged in a heated debate about the next course of action. However, at that very moment, the assassin (as it turned out, there was only one) struck with inhuman swiftness that not even the present witchers could detect in time, claiming another victim right before their eyes. Determined to stop it, Putnam sprinted after the assailant, with Anika closely following him to provide backup if needed. But before doing so, Anika quickly instructed Keira, Teirgh, and Nasira to evacuate everyone from the area and ensure the safety of all. The urgency to prevent further deaths was unanimously agreed upon, without a single word spoken.

It was a long and exhausting pursuit, but it helped Putnam uncover that the assassin had consumed Blizzard, as he had been able to recognize that high speed that made "time stop" for the user if they were in danger. This revelation gave Putnam another clue – the assassin was a witcher. This led him to dismiss the possibility of multiple killers. With this knowledge, he was motivated to push himself harder, attempting to corner the assassin and bring justice for the deaths caused.

He succeeded with the assistance of Anika, who cast a spell that blocked the assassin's path, though she suffered several minor injuries in the process due to being attacked by the killer, despite Putnam's efforts to protect her. While she didn't lose consciousness, she was weakened and needed time to recover on the ground. Nevertheless, her actions provided Putnam with the necessary opening to defeat the assassin due to the blocking spell she had cast, preventing any escape from the place they were in. Or so he thought, as the situation would prove to be more complex than a simple duel.

This duel took place in the palace greenhouse where they were. It was a whim of the count who owned the place, who, after visiting Toussaint and seeing the Royal Palace greenhouse, wanted something similar for himself. The duel transcended mere skill; it became a battle of wits, utilizing all the plants and especially the trees to hide, attack, and defeat the enemy. It also turned into a battle of attrition, as both were confined within the greenhouse due to Anika's spell, which served to fortify the area. As a result, they couldn't, for example, break the glass and escape if they wanted to. However, it's possible that if Putnam had recognized the assassin promptly, things might have unfolded differently. Unfortunately, because the assassin was entirely covered, except for

the eyes which revealed their mutant nature, Putnam didn't realize the truth until the end. By that point, exhaustion was getting the better of both of them, causing them to become more careless and sustain minor as well as some slightly deeper wounds in the process.

As the duel continued and despite his initial confusion over the weapons his opponent wielded, given that she was using two short swords like a Viper witcher, Putnam gradually recognized her identity by observing and analyzing her combat patterns. These patterns were something he could identify anywhere, but his earlier confusion had prevented him from doing so. Seizing the opportunity while the battle raged on, Putnam decided to play a psychological game with his adversary in an attempt to gain the upper hand. Trusting his instincts about her identity, he uttered the words, "Jolanta, you don't need to do this." Surprisingly, this tactic worked, revealing that the assassin was indeed, Jolanta. She had been assigned the task by the Redanian Secret Service, an organization with which she had been working for many years. However, hearing Putnam's voice again and the unexpectedly familiar and affectionate demeanor threw off the Cat witcheress, leading to her rapid defeat.

However, just as Putnam was about to corner Jolanta by grabbing her shoulder and pressing her against the glass to unveil the reason why she had been sent to kill those people, Anika's spell unexpectedly dissipated. The abrupt disruption caused both combatants to lose their footing, resulting in a fall onto a nearby balcony overlooking the Ismena River. The impact of the pressing without the spell working shattered a glass panel of the greenhouse, serving as a dramatic backdrop to their descent.

On the balcony, the fight didn't continue, at least not physically, as they were too exhausted from both their wounds and the combat. Instead, it turned into an intense discussion until Anika, now recovered and concerned about Putnam's situation, entered to look for him, overhearing part of the conversation. This made Jolanta aware of Anika's entrance and her hurried approach, which made her nervous.

In that moment, Jolanta impulsively kissed Putnam, leaving him confused and providing her with an opportunity to escape. By the time Putnam might have pursued her, it was already too late – she had leaped from the balcony into the Ismena River, seemingly facing certain death. Miraculously, she survived the fall, disappearing from the scene and evading capture forever. When Anika arrived, she found only a wounded Putnam to attend to, prompting her to inquire about

what had transpired and who the woman he had been speaking to was.

However, Anika didn't receive an extensive reply. Putnam simply told her that it was nobody, someone he knew, yes, and that he hadn't expected to encounter there, but it no longer held significance.

Leaving the palace was an impossibility without either leaping off the balcony to certain death or retracing their steps and confronting everyone. Thus, they found themselves in a state of safety – the assassin was deceased, and further fatalities had been averted; that was the crucial outcome. The specifics were of no consequence. However, the predicament remained only partially resolved, as potential future assassination attempts lingered. Yet, Putnam remained hopeful that the Temerian Intelligence Service would competently address this concern, and the limited success of these recent attempts might deter Redania from replicating such actions or initiating a more direct attack, at least temporarily. Anika refrained from commenting on this matter, sensing beneath Putnam's veneer of apparent professionalism an emotional impact stemming from the events that affected him more than he was willing to acknowledge.

After that, Putnam would collect his reward, using a piece of cloth stained with Cat witcheress's blood ripped from her clothing during the duel as evidence, and consider Jolanta as deceased. He would reply only to Jolanta's letters, responding to the ones he had sent her long ago, which he found accumulated at Kaer Seren, as a way to "close the wound," not expecting a response due to her apparent demise. This set his course toward what would unfold with Keira (finding a certain solace in the sorceress of Carreras), grieving for Jolanta and her presumed death in the process. And later, nearly two years after those events, he would enter his first enduring marriage after visiting Kerack.

As for Anika, things would be just as positive as with Nasira. Having reestablished contact after more than a decade of being out of touch, they would not only meet again but frequently reunite. During the 1300s Anika would occasionally summon Putnam to court, similar to what had happened with the Griffins of old.

Helping with the last stages of the cure (1288 - 1290)

The relationship with Keira, it wouldn't be one that taught him an important lesson. Instead, it would make him pay for all the women he used as comfort and mere objects of desire after Tubiel's death in 1280, before meeting D'yaebel and Jolanta. It would make him understand what these women, whose faces and

names he couldn't even remember due to being under the influence of Black / White Seagull, might have felt after he used and abandoned them without a word the next day. Perhaps there was some affection on the sorceress's part, yes, as the relationship lasted for almost two years despite everything, but the eccentric nature of the blonde mage never allowed him to be certain. So, the overall feeling Putnam was left with was that he had been used as a whim to flaunt, an object of desire, and an assistant for the final refinements of the Catriona Plague cure, nothing more.

Their relationship began in a straightforward and anticipated manner, rooted in professionalism. Amid flirtatious interactions during the celebration following the trade treaty's signing, Keira mentioned that she required an assistant for the concluding stages of testing the Catriona Plague cure. A witcher was the ideal candidate, serving both for procuring monster materials and for subjecting himself to tests related to refining the cure. This approach allowed her to identify any potential issues and observe possible side effects without risking the death of a test subject—a probable outcome for an average human. Additionally, the prospect of generous payment and an escape from financial worries was persuasive enough to convince Putnam to accept her proposition.

Although there was flirtation between them, the relationship's progression was gradual due to Putnam's professional demeanor. Additionally, the playful dynamic between them intrigued Keira—fueled by the Griffin's charm and the tension that existed between them. It's worth noting that Putnam's emotional state, still affected by Jolanta's presumed demise, led him to value his personal space and solitude. The Griffin fulfilled his role, providing the required monster materials. He also engaged in amicable dinners with the sorceress, gradually laying the foundation for what would transpire between them.

These dinners, originally scheduled bi-weekly, transitioned to weekly events and eventually became daily affairs. The accumulated tension between them eventually reached a crescendo during one of these meals, marking not only the onset of the second phase in their relationship but also the second phase of the reason why he had been hired —testing the Catriona Plague cure.

This second phase would be characterized by a more professional approach, even though something had developed between them. The cure remained the top priority. However, naturally, the blonde sorceress took good care of the witcher due to the significant work he was undertaking. Perhaps, it was during

this time that Keira developed some fondness for the two-eyed witcher due to the "nursemaid syndrome," as Putnam spent a considerable amount of time "ill," including through that year's winter. During this period, he managed to write to Keldar in Kaer Seren after eight long years of absence, assuring him of his survival and well-being, before finally reappearing there in 1289 and undergoing the Trial of the Sword.

The third phase of their relationship was characterized by a period of cohabitation. All the tests to refine the Catriona Plague cure had been completed, and Keira had only some further investigation remaining. This phase was vaguely reminiscent of his time with Marina, but much less healing (though not toxic) and filled with luxuries and other pleasures that were not quite as idyllic. In a certain sense, for Putnam, it was a blend of his time with Marina and his time with Radeyah. Putnam spent several months in Carreras, occasionally working on monster contracts in the sewers, as well as spending time with the sorceress, both personally and professionally (as the cure was almost ready, with just two more years to go). They attended parties of the aristocracy and other events together, where Keira was a guest and he accompanied her. These gatherings could be somewhat tedious (even when he was the center of attention), but the subsequent rewards often made it worthwhile.

It would also be during this time that Putnam's passion for painting, which he had harbored for quite some time, blossomed to nearly reach its full potential. His artistic pursuits had previously been confined to his winters in Kaer Seren as a form of entertainment, or his excellent sketches in his personal bestiary. However, in Carreras, his artistic talents flourished further, although he had not yet acquired the renowned luminist technique that would later make him famous in the art world under the alias of Joaquim Sorala. This luminist style would begin to develop during his marriage to Aine and become perfected during his marriage to Jolanta.

And the fourth and final phase of their relationship can be summarized quite simply, much like how it began. Putting aside the professional aspect, in that regard there wasn't any issue, Putnam realized or at least felt that he was being used as a mere object of desire by the sorceress. And as a result, he chose to end the relationship. It wasn't a bitter breakup, quite the opposite. One might not expect it, but it was quite peaceful and calm, with both of them remaining friends afterward. Following this, Putnam would fully re-immerse himself in The Path, setting his course for Kerack. This destination would leave one of the most

significant marks on his future, second only to Jolanta. In Kerack, Putnam would embark on a transformative journey, evolving from a mere Griffin witcher into the prototype of what would become a witcher of the school he would later establish—a Crane witcher. It was during this time that all the characteristics of this future school would gradually take on a more complete form.

The Second Witcher Tournament (Early 1290)

But before we delve deeper into Putnam's decade-long marriage to the elf from Kerack, we must focus on one event, albeit relatively minor, yet significant. And this is none other than the Second Witcher Tournament organized by the School of the Lynx, both to ascertain how many witchers were more or less remaining and to demonstrate to the survivors of the various schools, including the active schools (i.e., those fully operational but producing very few members, such as the School of the Griffin, and the semi-active/rebuilt schools like the Bear and Fox), that they were no longer the immoral outcasts that had tarnished the reputation of the rest, and to showcase the transformation of the Cat School. The tournament took place at the fortress the Lynx School used during the harshest winters – the former stronghold of the extinct School of the Wolf, Kaer Morhen, before the Lynxes' complete relocation to the Western Continent.

After breaking up with Keira in the spring of 1290, Putnam would reunite with Adalwulf on The Path, and thanks to him, he would learn about this event. Adalwulf explained that he had turned down the invitation because he had more pressing matters to attend to. However, if Putnam was interested, he could attend on his behalf and maybe join the Griffins who had confirmed their participation, as Lambert had mentioned in the letter with the invitation. Adalwulf added that Putnam could later share with him how the tournament had gone. Intrigued by the prospect of experiencing a tournament among fellow witchers (without it ending as badly as the first one), Putnam accepted and set his course for Kaer Morhen, following Adalwulf's directions. He knew he would have to reencounter with Lambert, but he reasoned that he had endured worse and could tolerate Lambert's presence with patience (and enough alcohol).

Lambert had also organized the tournament to see if Eskel would show up, as he hadn't heard from him in years, and hopefully, it would be a great addition to the ranks of the Lynxes. Additionally, he saw it as an opportunity to persuade the Cats who had separated from the School due to the reforms and had gone to attempt to reclaim Stygga. Lambert hoped the tournament would convince them

to join the reformed school. However, none of the Cats responded to the call, whether due to their deaths, their disdain for Lambert (as was the case with Jolanta), or simply a lack of interest.

At the tournament, there would be around 20 Griffins (including Putnam) out of the approximately 35 remaining, 35 Lynxes (including masters, recent graduates, and students, essentially the entire school), 20 Foxes out of the 50 remaining, 20 Bears (among them, Cervin, accompanied by his Hansa) – it was anyone's guess how many were left since they didn't keep track of their numbers seriously – and 10 from various schools that had been completely destroyed (varying in number, mostly being Vipers). In total, about 105 participants.

To be more serious, if we also consider those who were in distant lands and more isolated schools like the Lions in Zangvebar or the Dragons on the Tuyotuki Islands, their numbers wouldn't surpass 200 and some globally. That's to say, during that time, only the continent and the Tuyotuki Islands, and even that estimate is being generous.

The significance of the tournament, at least for Putnam, didn't lie in the event itself, but rather in his time spent with witchers from different schools. It helped smooth out some rough edges with witchers he had encountered before, most notably Cervin, as well as with Joël and Dragonfly. The two most important reconciliations were with Cervin and Dragonfly. While they didn't become friends, Putnam and Cervin developed a more cordial relationship. As for Dragonfly, Putnam apologized for how their previous relationship had ended (resulting in two solid slaps, one for not putting Keira and Lambert in their place back then, and another because Dragonfly had learned of Putnam abandoning Jolanta – that slap was out of solidarity). Nevertheless, after those incidents, they ended on good terms.

There were also some non-witcher guests at the tournament, such as Cervin's aforementioned Hansa (or well, almost the entire Hansa, as Coshunee was forbidden entry due to being a succubus), and people whom Lambert had come into contact with in one way or another (whether through Keira or individuals like Geralt), who were invited to serve as impartial observers or representatives of authorities to further reinforce the idea that not only the Lynxes but all witchers were an honorable guild. The most significant among these guests was Anika (this event would be pivotal for her, as it would give her the idea for the location of the school she would eventually find). She attended on behalf of Kaedwen, under the oath that she would not disclose the fortress's location to

anyone. Apart from the sorceress, other impartial observers/judges included individuals like August Van Der Ermus.

Considering the attendees at the tournament, including the non-witchers, there were approximately 115 people in total, give or take a few.

The tournament prize was nothing more and nothing less than something Geralt no longer found use for, but that any of the witches present at Kaer Morhen could make use of, whether for their own benefit or for their school. Geralt gave it to Lambert when the caravan passed through Toussaint. It was Tomas Moreau's work, something that Jerome, being his son, would likely have opposed as the prize and would have demanded to be destroyed due to what his father had done to him in the past. Fortunately, Jerome wasn't present there; he was guarding Kaer Seren alongside Keldar. For Lambert, parting with such precious documentation was a sacrifice, but he was willing to do it so that the other witches could see that the Cat School had changed and become better. And you might ask, Lambert? That Lambert? Yes, Vesemir's death had deeply affected him, and after almost two decades, he was a completely different man, although still somewhat a prick.

The tournament consisted of a series of physical tests that culminated in duels within an improvised arena. With around 80 participants (excluding Lynx adepts and non-witches), the competition was structured as follows: in groups of 20, two schools or groups would undertake all the tests (including challenges like "[The Killer](#)"), and the group with the highest number of participants successfully completing the tests would progress to the next round. This process was repeated until eight participants remained, who would then compete against each other in the arena until a winner emerged.

The tournament lasted approximately two weeks. With Cervin of the School of the Bear emerging as the winner, ironically, when all bets were against him. And what about Putnam? Well, The Golden Griffin made it to the quarter-finals but was defeated by Cervin, which didn't bother him too much. It meant more to Cervin, who found complete satisfaction in letting go of the grudge he still held against Putnam for the contract in Toussaint, thus making peace with him. He even offered Putnam, without asking for any compensation in return, the documents of Moreau's work as a gesture of goodwill and "friendship," prompted by Cervin's recognition of Putnam's genuine interest in those documents. Although not without complaints on August's part, since the vampire was very interested in having been able to study them. In fact, he had

been searching for them for literally a century.

After that, Putnam would give a copy of Moreau's work to Jabolet, thinking that it could interest him, thus solidifying the path of the new mutations for the future School of the Crane (hence, apart from his admiration for Geralt, the reason why the moral code he created together with Jolanta was named after the hair color of the legendary Wolf, it was his way of indirectly thanking him) and the original to Adalwulf once he found out about his joining the School of the Fox, both for its preservation and the plans he had for the southern school to return to its former glory.

Marriage with Aine (1290 - 1300)

Once the tournament was over, Putnam would continue on The Path, first stopping to see Adalwulf and recounting how everything had gone, just as he had promised. Then, he would make his way to Cidaris to visit Jabolet. Finally, he would arrive in Kerack, where life would take unexpected turns that he couldn't have anticipated at that point, especially through such a seemingly simple event. It was already mid-June of 1290 when he reached the city that had once been its own kingdom.

His visit to Kerack was, of course, for work. Along the way, he had come across a contract regarding a wereshark that was prowling the city's coastline and attacking fishermen during every full moon. The contract caught his attention enough for him to decide to take it on. Despite the risks, the city's fishermen's guild had offered a substantial reward, and it reminding him of his reencounter with Tubiel after ten years of not seeing each other, thing that only motivated more to do it and lift the curse of the wereshark. Although with what he had earned in Temeria, along with his time with Keira, had kept him afloat, his funds were beginning to run low.

The contract went well. Recalling Tubiel's plan in Tancarville before he appeared and would ruin it by killing the monster, as already mentioned, Putnam attempted to lift the curse of the wereshark. However, it turned out to be impossible since it was a second-generation therianthrope. The wereshark's actions were intentional, driven by blaming the local fishermen's guild for the death of its father, rather than by predator instincts. Its father had gone fishing one day and never returned. After discovering its ability to transform, it had searched the vast ocean in an attempt to find its father, but it was like searching

for a needle in a haystack. Despite its efforts, it never found him. Over the years, its resentment grew, and it eventually decided to seek revenge by attacking those it believed had taken its parent away from it. This led to a significant number of victims, which, if not for Putnam's intervention, could have been even more.

After the contract, as was customary, Putnam collected the reward and sought a place to spend the night. But not before stopping by the spice market and purchasing a few spices, thinking that once he left, he could sell them at a higher price in an inland location to earn some extra money, which wouldn't hurt for his upcoming travels. And where do you think he headed? To some shabby inn? Not at all. He went to none other than the Natura Rerum, unaware of the surprise that life had prepared for him in that luxurious establishment.

As mentioned before, he had been paid quite well for the contract. So, exhausted from the encounter, he thought, well, it wouldn't hurt to treat himself to a little luxury this time. On this occasion, he could afford it, and perhaps a good meal would do him well before continuing his journey to Gemmeria and the surrounding provinces, where he intended to spend most of the remaining year.

You can imagine the impression he caused when he entered the establishment, still wet and covered in both his own blood and the wereshark's, with a rather unfriendly or weary expression, depending on how you looked at it. It wasn't the most pleasant sight despite the respectful silence that fell over the tavern. Nonetheless, he was well received and attended to, with hopes that he would spend his well-earned coin on dinner as compensation for potentially scaring away other customers. In fact, as a hotel that the tavern claimed to be according to one of its signs (though at that time, it was still a small tavern in the process of expanding), they even offered him a bath and a chance to freshen up while they prepared his meal. He didn't decline, even though it ended up costing him more in total, including the food.

Upon returning to his table, he encountered the surprise that life had in store for him, a surprise he would later realize was quite pivotal: none other than Aine, one of the waitresses of the establishment and also a lighthouse keeper due to the extra taxes imposed on non-humans, so she needed two jobs. Aine was a beautiful elf with hair as white as snow and pink eyes, which sparked in Putnam what one might call love at first sight or infatuation, depending on how romantic one is. The attraction was mutual, as Aine was tired of enduring lecherous customers who, despite their high status or supposed university education,

behaved like animals. In contrast, the fact that this handsome witcher treated her with respect and courtesy was very pleasant for her and piqued her interest, despite the gossip of other diners who criticized him for being a mutant. Additionally, his heterochromatic eyes, like in the case of many other people before her, appeared exotic and enticing. This became a significant factor that would influence what would happen next, even though it might not have seemed so at first.

Putnam's dinner was peaceful. Normally, Putnam was someone who dined quickly, but that time, you could say he took his time to enjoy the food and drink. Not just because of the price, but also to savor the sight of Aine before he left, believing it would be a simple tavern crush and nothing more. He denied to himself that he also did it because it indirectly brought back memories of past loves like Marina or Veejovva – memories that, despite everything, comforted him due to the aforementioned apparent death of the so-called "Liliger of Novigrad," a situation he was still dealing with.

This subtle yet crucial factor became a turning point in the unfolding events, including their future marriage. As Putnam finally realized the passage of time, the tavern was preparing to close, and the staff hurried to complete their meals after most of the patrons had departed, affording them a well-deserved rest. Before settling the bill, Putnam observed the discriminatory behavior of other workers of the tavern towards Aine, based on her elven heritage, isolating her from the group engaged in conversation about the day's events and the clients. Driven by empathy, he decided to invite her to join him for dinner, even though he was already enjoying dessert. This sentiment was one he had encountered on numerous occasions, a consequence of his status as a witcher, exacerbated by the general ignorance about his profession and the prevailing propaganda against it.

Unbeknownst to them, this dinner marked a significant turning point for both, reminiscent of Putnam's prior experience with Marina, but with deeper implications. This shared meal would act as the pivotal catalyst for their budding relationship and eventual marriage, encompassing all that such a commitment entails. The genesis of this connection emerged from a seemingly simple one-night adventure. Their mutual attraction deepened as they engaged in conversation, fueled by shared experiences of loneliness and the scars of lives filled with adversity. As the tavern prepared to close for the night, their repressed

emotions ignited, culminating in an impassioned kiss that spoke volumes of their unspoken feelings.

As they embarked on the journey to Aine's abode—the lighthouse she called home—this initial kiss transformed into a profound exploration of their desires and emotions. With this intimate encounter holding immense significance, far beyond its initial simplicity.

When Aine and Putnam woke up the next day, a scene unfolded that, for Putnam, was reminiscent of what had happened with Marina, albeit without as much hangover and discomfort. That's not to say there wasn't any, there was. Despite the mutual attraction they felt, neither of them had expected to end up like this.

Deep down, Putnam was someone who always held onto a glimmer of hope, hence his famous resilience. He knew that if he stared into those eyes for too long, he would find himself drawn in and might give love another chance in his life, and perhaps even more. The connection with the elf that night had been intense, and in the gestures they exchanged, they had communicated as much as he and D'yaeb'l had done back in the day, though without being as primal.

Aine, with her gracious manners, invited him to have breakfast, taking the opportunity to show him around the lighthouse that the witcher still had no idea would become his home for the next ten long years. Putnam accepted, allowing a thick silence to linger as he let his thoughts wander, reminiscing about the events of the previous night while he ate, all the while with Aine watching him. Putnam, however, tried to avoid meeting her gaze, focusing solely on his meal. The elf's pink eyes conveyed pain, sorrow, and a yearning for connection born from a solitary life, something that he was determined not to succumb to, although it was difficult due to his compassion. In that sense, her eyes also reminded him of Alanna and the marriage they had, along with all the hurt she had caused him by abandoning him without explanation.

The idea of falling in love again or having a serious relationship didn't terrify him per se, but marriage did. That was something very serious, something he didn't feel capable of. Especially after the first one had ended in a tragic death, and the second in an unexplained abandonment. He feared bringing misfortune in that regard to Aine, which was partially true (more of a lie than the whole truth, despite how it ended). Furthermore, the supposed death of Jolanta was something hard to bear, and it reminded him of his plans to propose to the Cat witcheress. Plans that didn't come to fruition due to Fabio's expeditions and his

loyalty to the explorer, aside from the events that transpired two years prior.

Aine, on her part, noticed the unusual tension in Putnam as they shared breakfast. She could sense the mix of emotions in his gaze, but she respected his space and didn't press for answers. The previous night had been unique, and though she couldn't help feeling curious about what it meant to him, and whether his eternal loneliness might finally be dissipating, she knew that patience and time were crucial. Yet, she couldn't help but fear that sooner or later, he would grow tired of her. She didn't consider herself special, just another ordinary elf with a monotonous and dull life, going from work to home and vice versa. Sometimes, work was her home itself, as already said, she was not just a waitress but also a Lighthouse Keeper.

As breakfast unfolded, Aine decided to break the ice by sharing some anecdotes about her life at the lighthouse and the challenges she faced as an elf in a human world. Intrigued by her stories and the sincerity with which Aine spoke, Putnam began to gradually lower his defenses. Although the fear of commitment still lingered in his mind, the connection he felt with her couldn't be denied. It was like the waves, each one different, yet they carried familiar scents, slowly eroding the rocky barrier of his mind, trying to reshape it. Metaphorically speaking, the scents were what held him back.

It wasn't until breakfast concluded, and Putnam began gathering his belongings to leave, that the moment, which without a doubt would seal their destinies forever, occurred. And it was, by all accounts, a trivial thing. Putnam's dog, Frey, somehow had grown fond of the elf, for reasons unknown, and was becoming visibly sad at the thought of leaving the place. Aine, though she hadn't interacted much with the animal (given that she didn't have much time to do so the previous night, for quite obvious reasons), felt the same way. This prompted Putnam to make a promise, that he would see her again.

And so it was, as he would not stray far from Kerack.

In fact, he began taking contracts to protect ships from various maritime companies, such as Opiekenbeg and Sons, from sea monsters along the route (which was only about a three-day round trip, if the sea was very rough) or passing between Kerack and Cidaris at certain times. He would also use these passages through Cidaris as an opportunity to visit Jabolet. Occasionally, he would take the route to Gors Velen to check on Fabio and his family. This marked the beginning of Putnam's "proto-crane" period, according

to many historians, which would be significant (although not as significant as the presence of Jolanta) for the future witcher school that Putnam would establish in 1380.

This period was defined not only by these established routes but also by Putnam's development of novel techniques, admittedly somewhat rudimentary at the time. These techniques would only be refined and perfected with the integration of the knowledge from the School of the Cat that Jolanta brought with her into the school's methods. During this era, Putnam began to don lightweight armor and rely more on his Zerrikanian Repeating Crossbow when facing creatures like nixas or harpies in flight. This specific crossbow model became a signature weapon of the Cranes until the eventual introduction of firearms in the 18th century.

As time went by, the relationship between Aine and Putnam blossomed as each visit of the witcher came and went, despite the fears and doubts they both had at the beginning. Patience and mutual affection allowed them to overcome obstacles and build something solid and meaningful. Every encounter, every conversation, and every shared moment strengthened the bond between them until, without realizing it, in barely two months, Putnam found himself living in the lighthouse with her. And sooner rather than later, proposing to her.

In general, we can divide Putnam and Aine's marriage into two distinct stages, akin to the classic "Honeymoon" phase followed by the inevitable "monotony" of marriage. However, what sets their case apart is that the "Honeymoon" phase extended for about five years before gradually diminishing, eventually culminating in the divorce they would ultimately experience, thereby encompassing the previously mentioned decade-long span of their marriage.

During the more joyful phase, it is worth noting not only the modest yet notable enhancement in Aine's self-esteem but also the profound impact Putnam had in providing her with a sense of "family" and a place where she could genuinely feel cherished. On each occasion they visited Fabio and his family, Fabio's children affectionately referred to them as "Uncle Putnam" and "Aunt Aine." Regrettably, Aine had encountered the loss of her own family during at a young age, in a tragedy sadly all too common like a pogrom. This unorthodox yet heartfelt sense of "family" bestowed upon her brought an immense amount of joy, helping to fill a void that had existed for so long.

Putnam, on his part, enjoyed that life, which appeared to be perfectly balanced between his life as a witcher (as he didn't retire from that work, maintaining a similar routine but more focused on the fishermen of Kerack rather than traveling between coastal cities) and the quieter life he had always desired. It wasn't perfect, as Aine and Putnam argued frequently whenever he went away with the fishermen to the open sea to protect them from aquatic monsters, fearing he might not return. However, it was more than enough, and Putnam embraced it with both its virtues and flaws.

Furthermore, other factors such as the breathtaking views from the lighthouse, the climate, and more added to all of this. They led the witcher to eventually consider the city of Kerack as his second home during that time. Surprisingly, Putnam gained a positive reputation (even more than he already had), despite the peculiarities of the local residents. People would often seek his help without hesitation whenever they encountered any issues, especially among those involved in maritime professions, whether along the coast or out at sea.

During that period, Putnam accepted as many contracts as he could. He only declined those that would take him far away and consequently keep him separated from Aine for an extended period (with his limit being a maximum of seven days away, counting the round trip, and only if the job was exceptionally well-paid). This approach allowed them to live comfortably and freed Aine from one of her two jobs, leaving her only as a lighthouse keeper. This change provided her with enough free time to pursue her true passion, which was healing. She took advantage of Putnam's absences to delve deeply into her studies and would apply the practical aspect of her learning when he returned.

Overall, it was a relatively happy time, at least during the first five years. Putnam even reduced his use of the Black/White Seagull when dealing with his emotions or pain. During this period, the spouses had each achieved what they had dreamt of: financial stability, a good social life, a passionate and mostly healthy relationship (although Putnam remained someone who was closed off and had an "I don't need anyone's help" attitude), among many other things.

However, as they say, what goes up must come down, and that descent began around 1295 when Putnam's repressed feelings for Jolanta became too much to bear. The pain he felt over her supposed death, which he had tried to push aside

in a poorly attempted act of moving on, started seeping into the relationship like a slow leak, eventually eroding it.

It would also be at this stage that most of the lessons life had been teaching Putnam over the years would take full effect, transforming the witcher into someone very similar to how he would be as the Grandmaster of the School of the Crane, although not entirely. He still had some stones to remove from his vital backpack to achieve that. And one of them, the heaviest, would be the already mentioned apparent death of Jolanta. This stone would become the primary weight that would destroy his marriage with Aine.

As the years went by, the relationship between Putnam and Aine began to undergo subtle yet noticeable changes, entering into this second phase. The happiness they had shared in the first five years seemed to slowly fade away, as if the shadows of Putnam's repressed feelings had gradually slipped between them. Aine noticed that Putnam would sometimes get lost in his thoughts, and despite his attempts to conceal it, his emotional distance became more evident.

The walks along the beach, a tradition they had during every sunset and which had once been moments of shared serenity, were now filled with uncomfortable silences. Aine sensed that something had changed in Putnam, but she was afraid to broach the subject, fearing it would trigger a heated argument. Meanwhile, Putnam grappled internally with the ghost of the past that were his unresolved feelings for the Cat witcheress and her supposed death – which continued to secretly haunt him. He believed he was accustomed to these feelings after having lost so much and successfully overcome the deaths of Tubiel and Sigurd, but it turned out not to be the case.

Despite their differences, they still cared for each other and shared moments of tenderness and passion, although these became increasingly less frequent. Aine, though concerned, didn't want to pressure Putnam, and he, in his stubborn way, avoided discussing what was tormenting him. As always, he believed that if he allowed himself to show vulnerability to the world once more, as he had done with Tubiel, Jolanta, D'yaebel, Marina, and Nabla (arguably the most significant women in his life, apart from Aine), it would eventually destroy him completely as he wouldn't be able to bear it any longer. The passionate and solid relationship they had built was starting to slowly crack, like an ancient fortress eroded by the wind and time.

The inhabitants of Kerack, especially the fishermen, noticed the change in the

couple. Putnam was no longer the same cheerful and determined witcher they used to seek out to solve their problems. He used to even share a beer with them and chat after a hard day's work. Now, he was more serious, quieter, and withdrawn. Many times, he would just collect his reward and leave. Aine, on her part, tried to hold onto the life they had built together, but her intuition told her that something was broken deep within Putnam. This saddened her greatly and caused the little self-esteem she had built up to crumble rapidly, adding to the factors that would eventually lead to the end of their marriage.

And so, the lives of Putnam and Aine entered a new phase, characterized by growing emotional distance and unresolved tensions. The pillars that had supported their relationship seemed to waver, and the prospects, much like in a stormy season, were not promising.

Still, their marriage endured for quite a while, reaching the decade mark. The specific reason? Who knows. Perhaps the pillars on which it stood, despite wobbling, were made of resilient material. Maybe destiny enjoyed watching things slowly crumble, or perhaps it was something as simple as what indirectly brought them together in the first place – Putnam's dog, Frey. It would be with the natural passing of the dog that things would start to get even worse, edging closer to the inevitable end. While the structure of their love didn't collapse entirely, it was gradually deteriorating, sending them clear signals that they should let go soon.

This event heightened the existing tensions and laid bare the fragility of their love. As the relationship deteriorated further, the signs became increasingly clear that the end was inevitable. Aine noticed that Putnam's presence at home became sporadic and their interactions grew more distant. She feared that he might even be unfaithful to her with someone else, as the witcher's past reputation as a ladies' man eventually reached her ears. This revelation deeply affected her due to her low self-esteem and insecurities. Despite her efforts to maintain their connection, the emotional distance between them continued to widen.

Putnam, increasingly tormented by Jolanta's apparent death and his unresolved feelings for the Cat witcheress, sought refuge more and more in his work as a witcher, trying to deny to himself the truth of it, much like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. He spent extended periods away from home, chasing monsters and facing dangers. On the other hand, Aine immersed herself in her role as a lighthouse keeper and in her now-established work as a healer. Since after much

study, she had finally opened a clinic in the lighthouse to treat people and pursue her passion. She didn't have many clients, unfortunately, so she continued her work as a lighthouse keeper. If she focused more than she should on the clinic despite the lack of patients, it was to seek an escape from the growing loneliness she felt.

The moments of argument between Putnam and Aine became more frequent and heated. Their differences and resentments came to the surface, and hurtful words filled the space that was once filled with laughter and affection. And although most of the time, the arguments ended in passionate encounters, these encounters didn't serve to resolve the problems they were facing. But despite it all, neither of them wanted to be the first to admit that their marriage was coming to an end and that it might be best to separate.

Aine, due to emotional dependency. Putnam, because he refused to let the dream of a happy marriage and a relatively peaceful life that he had envisioned with Tubiel, and that he was trying to fulfill despite his death, turn into a nightmare due to another death, which in this case was Jolanta's (since he didn't know she was still alive). This failure, unlike others, would be too much to bear after so many years of fighting against all odds (both literally and metaphorically). He was resilient, yes, and tried to be better, yes. Knowing that even if he took two steps back, he could then take four steps forward. But even people like him can get tired over time and say "screw it" to everything.

And so it happened, as what ultimately destroyed the marriage left them both deeply affected. And this would be nothing other than mutual infidelity. Aine first, with a guard from the border outpost who would often visit her at the clinic, caught by the witcher (though he didn't say anything), and Putnam with a former love, the sorceress Radeyah, caught by Aine (though she didn't say anything), who had come to the North for some matters, heard about Putnam, and wanted to exact her revenge by abandoning him as he had done to her 23 years ago.

The mutual betrayal of infidelity marked a point of no return in Putnam and Aine's marriage. Although both kept silent about what they had discovered, the tension between them became unbearable. Every look, every gesture was laden with suspicion and pain. Aine felt devastated by Putnam's betrayal and hurt by her own mistakes. The trust they had built over the years crumbled into pieces.

The distance between them became insurmountable, like an impassable chasm.

Arguments intensified, and moments of passion turned into distant memories. Even the most trivial conversations seemed forced and filled with unexpressed resentment. Attempts to fix things only resulted in more conflict, and the sense of being trapped in a destructive cycle grew stronger.

Aine found herself caught in a whirlwind of emotions. The self-esteem she had built during the early years of their marriage had crumbled completely. The feeling of not being enough for Putnam haunted her constantly, and she blamed herself for not being able to keep the passion they once shared alive. Her own insecurities paralyzed her, preventing her from taking the necessary steps to confront reality and make difficult decisions.

Putnam, on his side, struggled with his own internal demons. The appearance of Radeyah in his life again shook him deeply, reviving the mistakes of his past. He blamed himself for giving in to attraction, jeopardizing his marriage and everything he had built with Aine. Guilt and confusion mixed within him, and as the relationship deteriorated further, he grew more distant and reserved.

Eventually, a point came where they could no longer ignore the reality. Both knew that their marriage was in ruins, that the pillars on which they had built their life together had crumbled completely. Aine and Putnam, despite their deep feelings and shared memories, had to face the harsh truth that they could no longer move forward together, with Aine breaking their marital contract as a testament to that fact.

The decade of love, growth, and challenges they had shared came to its conclusion, leaving Putnam and Aine facing an uncertain future apart. Although the story of their marriage ended in divorce, each carried with them the lessons learned and memories of the joyful and painful moments they had shared. As they continued their separate paths, it remained to be seen how they would find healing and inner peace after this turbulent chapter in their lives.

Certainly, if there's something to appreciate about the marriage with Aine ending in such a manner, it's that as a result of its conclusion, the witcher journeyed to Gors Velen in search of Fabio. Initially, his intention was to seek the help and guidance of his best friend, but his thoughts shifted during the journey, leading him to make a casual "how is the family" visit instead. Little did he know back then, destiny had something significant in store for him upon arrival – a voyage that would shape history.

Discovery of the Silk Islands and the Western Continent (March 11, 1302 - September 5, 1306)

"Fabio, you know I've always been ready to face dangers alongside you. If there's something beyond that vast sea, I want to be there with you to discover it. I told you I'd be there until the end, didn't I? Well, until the end, my friend, until the end, even if it costs me my life."

—Putnam to Fabio Sachs at the port of Gors Velen before boarding the expedition ship that would discover the Silk Islands and the Western Continent.

After his divorce from Aine, Putnam sought the support of his best friend, Fabio, with whom he candidly shared the details of how he had reached that point in his marriage. The close relationship between them allowed for open discussions about what had happened before Putnam adopted the distinctive "romantic cocky rebel" attitude that characterized him in the early 14th century. This interaction with Fabio provided different perspectives to the witcher, which gradually, albeit unknowingly by Putnam, eroded his new attitude, making it less enduring.

But apart from discussing sentimental matters, they also talked about other things, and in this conversation, Fabio ended up sharing his exciting plan to carry out an expedition that, unknowingly at that moment, would become his penultimate and one of his most significant endeavors. Despite being nearly fifty years old and feeling aged, Fabio was motivated to explore the possibilities that life still held for him. With his children already independent and the unfortunate loss of his wife Erin, the academic perspective no longer satisfied his restless spirit. He was determined to prove his theories about what lay beyond the vast Great Sea and not spend his life speculating until he died. As for the money he had, he saw no better way to spend it than on such a risky venture. The wealth obtained from his two previous expeditions, along with wise investments that had paid off, had become too much for him to manage. He cared little about being labeled as crazy and that it would be considered suicide by everyone, including several royal courts. There were wealthy individuals who spent their money on more foolish and extravagant things that did not try to contribute or didn't contribute anything to the world. Besides, his children weren't in need of money as he had raised them well enough to manage on their own and live comfortably without his assistance. His daughters had successful businesses, and his only son, Putnam Sachs, was a renowned painter, with paintings that sold for a fortune.

Upon hearing the idea of the expedition, Putnam couldn't help but smile. Yes, it was utter madness. But without a doubt, he was in. He had sworn that he would go to the ends of the earth for Fabio, and he would. Too many failed relationships, romantic or otherwise, to allow himself to fail in this and leave his friend hanging. Especially knowing the significance of it all, whether they failed and perished at sea or succeeded, finding something and returning to tell the tale.

After that, two years passed—two years during which Putnam and Fabio saw each other occasionally as the explorer organized everything and Putnam continued honing his aquatic witcher skills by taking coastal contracts or protecting ships. He was preparing himself for what would undoubtedly be the adventure of their lifetimes. It was the month of March in the year 1302, specifically the 11th day, when it would finally begin.

At last, the long-awaited departure day arrived. The port was bustling with activity as Putnam and Fabio oversaw the final preparations for the expedition. The ships, two to be precise, based on designs that combined Redanian galleys with influences from Cidarian galleys, had been commissioned by Fabio. They were impressive in both size and design, loaded to the brim with supplies, crew (among them some members of other expeditions like Istredd and Eberhatt), and tools for the journey. While most people, even within the expedition, considered this adventure to be madness, the payment was too good, and the spirit of determination and excitement in the air was palpable despite it all.

The morning was crisp and clear as the two friends stood on the deck of one of the ships, gazing at the horizon. The sails fluttered in the sea breeze as they bid farewell to the coastline they had known all their lives. As the ship sailed further away from the mainland, Putnam and Fabio exchanged a meaningful look, reminiscing about all the times they had overcome challenges together.

The days at sea turned into weeks and then months. The crew sailed through storms and calm waters, keeping hope alive as they pursued Fabio's bold vision. Putnam, on his part, was tireless in his preparations and in protecting the crew from various dangers, showcasing his skills acquired as a witcher adapted to the open sea. This marked the emergence of the more "Crane-like" Putnam, leaving behind the "Proto-Crane" era of Putnam before the formation of the witcher school.

In fact, due to one of these storms, they had to make a stop at the island of

Basilia, the westernmost civilized place (specifically, west of the Skellige) known to both Nordlings and Nilfgaardians (more Nilfgaardians than Nordlings, it must be said). While it provided them with a rest and the opportunity to gather strength for the rest of the journey, it also caused further delays because the ships needed repairs. In Putnam's case, it turned out to be positive as it allowed him to renew equipment that had been damaged or worn out from defending against monsters, so he didn't complain.

During this time, the witcher defended the crew from all sorts of aquatic and aerial monsters, from some he already knew, such as nixas, drowners, and sea serpents, to others he hadn't encountered before but managed to handle and then study, such as ceireans, zatarans, ranamaris, and afancs. These monsters would later become part of the future bestiary of the Cranes and the collective work colloquially known as the Tome of Monsters. On more than one occasion, the expedition came close to losing Putnam, but his skill as a witcher, along with the proto-techniques and equipment he had developed and brought with him, that would become part of the school he would establish, even though it was still 79 years away, served him well.

During the nights, it was customary for Putnam and Fabio to sit on the deck, gazing at the stars and sharing stories. They reminisced about moments of laughter, challenges overcome, and how they had come to this point. Despite the uncertainty the vast ocean presented, their friendship and Fabio's determination kept their spirits united, and with faith that they would achieve their goal. After all, they had faced worse challenges before.

Continuing with the journey, the two ships pressed onward, navigating dangers and challenges in the uncharted waters. Supplies were carefully managed, and the crew remained focused on the goal ahead. As the months passed, Putnam and Fabio shared their determination with the rest of the crew, inspiring them to stay united and not lose hope.

But as time passed, nearing a year of sailing, provisions began to run low, and the crew's morale was inevitably affected. However, at the last moment, just when a mutiny was about to erupt, Putnam found a glimmer of hope on the horizon. They finally spotted land, an unknown island that could hold the key to the success of their expedition if it wasn't a mirage. This island turned out to be none other than Hawaiki, where, unbeknownst to Putnam, he would spend a significant part of his life. Excitement filled the air as the ships headed towards the shore, hearts brimming with anticipation and determination. In just a few

hours, it would all be over. Fabio had been right – beyond the continent lay a world waiting to be discovered and explored.

Unfortunately, just as they were finally approaching the land in a calm and composed manner after almost a year of journeying, a sudden and unexpected storm caught them off guard. It caused the ships to run aground on the coast of Hawaiki, leaving them stranded there, at least for what seemed like a lengthy period of time, if not forever.

The four years in the Silk Islands

By the time they awoke on the shore, battered and scattered, they could observe the wreckage of the ships. They realized that even if engineers and builders had come (ironically, as a precaution for the possibility of having to stay in their newfound land for a while, Fabio had been wise in that regard), it would take a long time to repair them. They were forced, without a doubt, to explore the island and survive. And so it was, they had to spend four long years on the main of the [Silk Islands](#) before they could return home. This marked the beginning shortly after, of the first contacts between the natives and the Nordlings.

These initial encounters were almost deadly. In a curious way, they echoed how the Nordlings had received the elves and other non-humans upon arriving to colonize The Continent back in the day, but in reverse. Whenever they attempted to engage in conversation with the natives they came across, the kindest response they received was a barrage of stones, spears, or arrows – somewhat reminiscent to several members of the expedition, such as Istredd, Eberhart, Fabio, and Putnam, to a certain encounter in the Far North, but without the aid of Vallaryel to serve as a bridge between both worlds. In fact, on more than one occasion, the arrows found their mark, though fortunately, without any fatalities.

They settled along the coast, constructing the settlement that would later become the capital of Hawaiki, Elmia, named in honor of the man who would eventually be known as Saint Elmo. He had ensured under his guidance that the ships didn't fare worse despite the storm, and he was the first to show the initiative to survive and explore in order to return home as soon as possible, when everyone else was demoralized.

It wouldn't be until some of the aforementioned arrows from the natives inflicted seemingly harmless impacts on members like Putnam, Fabio, Elmo, Eberhatt, and other expedition members, that the dynamics between nordlings and natives began to change for the better. And it was all thanks to Istredd and

his concern for his friends and the rest of the expedition members. It turned out that these arrows were coated with a slow-acting indigenous poison that posed a lethal threat to those injured. Even for Putnam, who had the advantage of his witcher biology, things looked grim (though he would eventually assimilate and adapt to the poison, recovering as expected, but nobody could have foreseen this at that time given his condition).

Amid the growing concern over the effects of the indigenous poison on the injured, Istredd, driven by desperation and the desire to save his companions, decided to commit an act of recklessness. He chose to seek help from the natives in finding a cure. He knew that it was highly likely they would attempt to kill him, but he had no other option. Trying to haphazardly mix unknown plants in an attempt to find an antidote on his own would be foolish and could even be considered involuntary manslaughter depending on how one looked at it.

The only thing he knew was that they didn't understand Common. Relying on his extensive knowledge of languages, he attempted to use the Elder Speech to see if it might somehow open channels of communication. He was met with a barrage of arrows, barely able to utter a word. It wasn't until he recited a spell in the Elder Speech to protect himself that the attacks ceased and the natives looked at him curiously. Not because of the magic he had used, as they had their equivalent of mages and druids called a "ruānuku," but because of the language he had employed, which seemed both familiar and strange to them, since they spoke a distant dialect of the Elder Speech.

Using the power of the spell, Istredd successfully quelled the barrage of arrows from the natives and seized their attention. As the tension in the air eased, Istredd initiated a form of communication through a combination of gestures and sporadic words. His objective was to build a bridge of mutual comprehension, transcending the linguistic barrier that had initially divided them.

Despite the formidable obstacles at the outset, Istredd's persistence began to bear fruit. Slowly but surely, he managed to convey his purpose, earnestly expressing that neither he nor his companions were monsters; rather, they were individuals much like the natives themselves, with their own feelings, dreams, and aspirations. With a mix of carefully chosen words and heartfelt gestures, he conveyed his quest to find a remedy for the venomous effects of the arrows that had harmed his wounded friends and allies during the last attack. He

emphasized that his goal was to prevent their deaths, as he held a deep respect and affection for them. In addition, he touched upon various other topics, seeking to establish common ground and a foundation of mutual understanding.

The natives, cautious yet intrigued by this outsider who seemed to speak in a language that was both familiar and strange, began to observe his actions with more curiosity than hostility. As Istredd demonstrated his unwavering determination, empathy, and eagerness to comprehend them, some of them started to embrace his presence and even apologize for their last attack.

Concurrently, they cooperated in his quest to find a solution for the poison. It's worth noting that initially, these individuals were few in number, but their ranks grew as the mage's benevolence became increasingly evident to them.

As Istredd persisted in his efforts to bridge the gap between their cultures, his actions spoke volumes about his intentions. The barriers that had once separated them began to crumble, replaced by a shared sense of purpose and mutual understanding. Gradually, more of the natives came to recognize the authenticity of his mission and the sincerity of his desire to aid his friends and allies.

Through persistence and empathy, Istredd not only diffused the hostility that had marred their initial interactions but also forged a connection that transcended language and cultural differences. His willingness to engage with them on their own terms, coupled with his dedication to finding a remedy for the venom, ultimately swayed the majority of the natives.

It was a slow and delicate process, marked by frustrated attempts at communication and misunderstandings. However, as already mentioned, gradually, Istredd and the natives began to collaborate, and their cooperation improved over time. Eventually, they found an antidote when Istredd visited the local ruānuku after one of the natives suggested it. The mage swiftly applied it to save all the wounded individuals (with the exception of Putnam, who had healed on his own due to his witcher nature, developing future immunity).

The journey from initial hostility to successful collaboration was characterized by the perseverance of Istredd and the natives. Despite the language barriers and cultural differences, they managed to bridge the gap through shared goals and a mutual desire for the well-being of their companions. Through trial and error, they developed effective means of early communication, using gestures, simple words, and even the universal language of empathy until Istredd developed a

dictionary of the language during those four years.

As the partnership flourished, it became evident that both sides were motivated by the same fundamental values: the preservation of life and the fostering of understanding. Istredd's determination to save his friends and allies, coupled with the natives' willingness to set aside their initial suspicions after witnessing the mage's goodness, laid the foundation for a harmonious relationship based on mutual respect during that period.

The first year was the toughest. Not only due to the initial conflicts with the natives and the longing for Nordling lands, but also the adaptation to an unfamiliar, hostile, and wild environment while they work on repairing the ships completely. A considerable part of the expedition ended up dying from various tropical diseases. Despite this, with Istredd's help in establishing a relationship of mutual respect with the natives, and as they gradually interacted more with their "new neighbors," things started to change. There were casualties among the Silk Islanders as well, since the Nordlings had brought diseases to which they had no immunity. However, the magic and knowledge (likely of elven origin due to the dialect they spoke) of the local ruānuku prevented further deaths among them.

It must be said, that none of them saw that as a punishment from the gods in the case of the Nordlings, and in the case of the Silk Islanders from Paparuda for interacting, but as a trial set, at least in the case of the Silk Islanders by the rival of their deity Paparuda, Martolea, who was believed to have "taken away" the tapairus from them in the past (the name by which they referred to the elves that arrived at the Silk Islands after one of their colony white ships deviated from its course toward The Continent and reached the islands) Overcoming these challenges was considered by the most religious individuals in both groups as a way to demonstrate their worthiness for deeper mutual understanding and interaction.

The second year proved to be better. The surviving Nordlings learned to adapt and make the most of what the island had to offer, thanks to both their ingenuity and the assistance of the natives. The latter guided them in various matters, such as hunting animals, cooking, using plants, and many more aspects. All of this took place in Elmia, as the settlement had evolved by that year into a hub of trade and cultural exchange between the two groups through barter. The Silk Islanders offered their aid and knowledge, and in return, the Nordlings provided products salvaged from the ships that intrigued the Silk Islanders.

This second year, out of the four that occurred, would also be one of the best for a simple reason. Many Nordlings who came on the expedition ended up forming relationships with native women (primarily those who were widowed due to their partners falling victim to attacks by the orange dragons). This, to a considerable extent, alleviated the loneliness and uncertainty they felt. In fact, it gave them a sense of home when the first mixed-race children began to be born shortly thereafter.

Putnam even managed to find a partner (or something resembling it, as they never clarified what they were). She would be one of the many who would wear down gradually the romantic, cocky rebel attitude he had adopted after the trauma of his divorce with Aine. She was the daughter of the local ruānuku and his apprentice, named Wai Oro Cretu, or Creti, as the Griffin witcher would affectionately call her. In fact, it would be Creti who would show him the yet-unnamed (by the Nordlings, it must be said, as the Silk Islanders referred to them as Ard Darh, translated from their dialect as Mountains of the Birds) Sachs Mountains. It was in this place that Putnam would spend the remaining years of his life in the Silk Islands before his return to the Northern Kingdoms, living in a house that Creti and he built together. Unbeknownst to him at the time, this is also where he would establish the fortress of the School of the Crane decades later.

The story of how Putnam and Creti met is rather straightforward. It all began with troubles caused by the presence of orange dragons on the rivers of the island. Putnam, driven by his sense of duty, stepped forward to confront these monsters and protect the inhabitants, both Nordlings and Silk Islanders. On a fateful day, an orange dragon attempted to attack her while she was fishing in the river, but Putnam intervened just in time, eliminating the threat and rescuing her from danger.

This act marked the turning point in Putnam's relationship with the Silk Islanders, which had been rather limited until that point due to the fear that his mutant nature might worsen relations between the Nordlings and the natives, fueled by concerns of fear and discrimination similar to what occurred in the Northern Kingdoms. Luckily, he was proven wrong. Putnam's intervention not only saved her life but also forged a connection between him and Creti, and by extension, with her people. As a result, he found himself drawn into the heart of their community, where he began to interact more deeply with the Silk Islanders. Over time, he

endeared himself to them through his willingness to assist with their ongoing struggles against the monsters that plagued their island (despite the limitations he faced with his weaponry and armor) and had claimed the lives of many of their finest warriors.

However, it wasn't just Putnam's bravery that captivated Creti and, later, the rest of the Silk Islanders. His striking appearance, which combined his natural beauty, witcher nature, and his distinct charisma, made him stand out among them. People were naturally curious about his origins and unique abilities. This curiosity was most evident in Creti, who felt a special fascination towards Putnam, sparking an interest that went beyond his role as a monster hunter, and Putnam happily answered her curiosity.

Interestingly, also during this time, Putnam's appearance underwent some noticeable changes. The island's sun bestowed upon him a deep tan, while his beard and hair took on a sun-kissed, beachy blond hue. Moreover, many of the tattoos that Putnam later acquired to cover numerous scars, which would become quite eye-catching for many people in the future, were done during this era by Creti in the traditional style of the Silk Islands. This served as a means for both of them to better connect due to the language barriers they often faced.

And why were the Silk Islands named as such? The reason is rather simple: the Silk Islanders were far from being a backward people. A prime example of their sophistication was evident in their clothing, which showcased their departure of all the tribal clichés that you could imagine. Their clothing varied in length based on the season, with longer garments worn during the monsoon season to shield against humidity brought by the intense rains.

What's particularly intriguing is that these garments were crafted from a type of native silk worm thriving on the islands. However, their utilization of these silk worms extended beyond clothing; they also harnessed them for other purposes, such as dyeing their clothes with a spectrum of colors. This was achieved by collecting the "saliva" that these silk worms secreted in different colors, which served as a form of communication among the worms themselves.

Consequently, the name "Silk Islands" emerged, encapsulating the islands' intricate relationship with these silk worms and the culture of the Silk Islanders themselves.

The civilization of the Silk Islanders, in comparison to that of the Nordlings, was

considered primitive in some aspects while advanced in others. Due to the lack of mineral deposits, for example, they didn't possess steel swords and had to rely on obsidian extracted from volcanoes. These obsidian blades were then enchanted by a ruānuku to enhance their durability. Additionally, they didn't have a monetary system and relied on barter for trade.

However, in contrast to these limitations, much like the Aen Seidhe did in the Northern Kingdoms, the Silk Islanders boasted beautiful cities that were fully integrated with nature. These cities were either inherited from the "tapairus" or built by them; their origins remained a mystery. Unlike the elven cities that were destroyed during Nordling colonization, these cities were gradually fused with the structures constructed by the Nordling and Dwarven settlers over time, as colonization began. This merging process resulted in a strikingly syncretic urban landscape, reminiscent of the one found in the Nilfgaardian city of [Baccalà](#) who mixed Barsaman and Nilfgaardian architecture, for example.

On the other hand, while they lacked the advanced navigation knowledge required to cross an entire ocean, they did possess the skills necessary to navigate between the islands and engage with other Silk Islanders living on them. Moreover, when sea conditions were favorable, they could venture to the Western Continent, which remained visible from Hawaiki on clear days without requiring telescopes due to its close proximity. During these visits, they would fish in the coastal waters, catching species of fish that were absent from the islands. These unique catches were then utilized for various purposes, showcasing the resourcefulness of the Silk Islanders.

In the second year of their stay, the Silk Islanders revealed the existence of a new continent to the Nordlings on a clear day while they were teaching the Nordlings about their fishing techniques, sparking Fabio's motivation to explore it alongside the remaining members of the expedition once both ships had been fully repaired. Tragically, during their first exploration of the Western Continent in the fourth year, Fabio and his companions succumbed to a mysterious illness after reaching what would later be known as Fabio's Cape. Simultaneously, the other half of the expedition, equipped with one of the repaired ships, returned to the Northern Kingdoms to share news of this groundbreaking discovery.

Despite Putnam's strong desire to accompany his friend on the exploration, Fabio directed him to join the latter group. Putnam's responsibility was to ensure their safety during the journey back, protecting them from potential sea monsters that might be encountered in the Great Sea, just as he did on their

journey to the islands.

The third year of the expedition living in Hawaiki was the most easygoing. While they continued to repair the ships with the surviving specialists who had overcome tropical diseases and the assistance of Silk Islanders from both Hawaiki and other islands—skilled sailors who knew which woods to use for repairing the ships, based on the ones they used for crafting their boats—many unconsciously started to assume they would stay there. This sentiment was especially noticeable among those who had started families with the native women, as they began to consider it better to raise their children on the island.

Putnam, though without a family due to the characteristic witcher infertility, was among them. Without realizing it, he increasingly spent more time with the Silk Islanders, essentially becoming one of them. In fact, he even began speaking their language more or less fluently and was taught a martial art known as Mau Rakau, which was only taught to those warriors who held a significant place within the community. The Silk Islanders even gave him a nickname, not because they struggled to pronounce Putnam's name, but as a sign that he was one of them. They came to call him "Maka Suilean" (translated from the Silk Islands dialect as "*the one with different eyes*" or "*the one with two-colored eyes*," approximately).

The fourth year, initially, was similar to the third, until the ships were repaired and farewells had to be exchanged, along with the decision-making by those who had formed families in Hawaiki. Whether to stay or to leave. The final decision was to depart with their families and settle in realms like Cidaris, where due to trade, there were more foreign people and individuals of mixed origins. This choice aimed to avoid, as much as possible, the typical discrimination prevalent in the Nordling mentality. In fact, it was thanks to this action that word about the existence of the Silk Islands and the Western Continent began to spread among the common people. Initially, as rumors and tales of adventures in distant lands, and later as truth when the Nilfgaardian Empire confirmed their existence, discovered a route that took not nearly a year, but a month and a half, and subsequently initiated the colonization of the Western Continent at the end of the century.

This information would also reach the Nordling monarchies through Anika, once she reunited again with Putnam. However, much like the common folk, the monarchs didn't pay it much heed, dismissing it as mere folktales and exaggerations made by the returning expeditionaries from the islands until the

threat of an even greater expansion by Nilfgaard, with an entire new continent at its disposal, rich in resources, became evident.

As an interesting fact, due to this new route discovered by the sailors of the Nilfgaardian Empire, the island of Basilia would be annexed to the empire. Thus, it became the first Oversea Province (since Sabana, as such, was a Nilfgaardian colony using Cintra as a proxy).

The last embrace with Fabio (Fabio 's Last Expedition and death) & The return to home

"Don't do anything reckless if you don't have Eberhatt watching your back, got it?"
—Putnam's last words to Fabio Sachs

The farewell with Fabio (and also Istredd and Eberhatt), like all farewells, was tough. There were emotional tears and hugs from both those who would continue exploring and those who were leaving. In Putnam's case, the farewell was not only due to concerns for Fabio 's safety (to which Fabio assured him that Istredd and Eberhatt were there to protect him and the rest of the expedition members with him), but also because he felt he was not fulfilling the promise he had made to himself to stay with the explorer until the end.

However, the weight of this feeling was lifted by the explorer himself, who reassured Putnam that protecting the other expedition members as they returned to the Northern Kingdoms was akin to protecting him as well. While not entirely convinced, Putnam accepted this perspective and joined the others on their journey back. Unbeknownst to him, his best friend would soon succumb to a mysterious tropical illness, becoming the final member of that initial Nordling expedition to the Western Continent to pass away. Putnam clung to the hope that this wasn't a permanent farewell, but rather a "see you later," perhaps after a year or two.

As four years went by without any news from the explorer or the two mages, Putnam came to the somber realization that they had likely met their demise (which was indeed true). This realization plunged him into a deep depression, haunted by the persistent feeling that he should have been there to make a difference. This sentiment only deepened his prolonged "romantic cocky rebel" attitude, a coping mechanism he had adopted to navigate the trauma of his failed marriage with the elf and, later on, the profound loss of his best friend and other friends. This demeanor would persist for almost two decades, slowly wearing away over time.

The Lover (1306 - 1325)

"Such pleasures require their own form of payment, my dear."

—Putnam Pitch (1306 - 1325)

In Putnam's case, this "screw it all" attitude became evident after the divorce and his departure from the lighthouse. Putnam adopted an attitude of indifference towards matters like love and personal relationships. He felt he had experienced enough failures in those areas. Particularly, his inability to be back with Jolanta due to her apparent death, and Fabio's more than probable death, had left wounds that wouldn't heal for a long time—perhaps even more painful than the loss of the Lioness of Brenna and Sigurd.

The notion of surrendering to the current of life without worrying too much about the consequences began to take root in his mind. After all, if life made him pay for his mistakes in such harsh ways, even though he always tried to make up for them sooner rather than later, it was all the same.

The Bitterness and disillusionment from how his marriage ended, led him down a path of self-destruction once again. If life seemed like a Zangvebarian jungle where everyone competed against each other without caring about the rest, Putnam was ready to play his part. The attitude he adopted could be described as a "romantic cocky rebel," a blend of rebellion and arrogance that allowed him to maintain an emotional distance from everything he once held dear.

The womanizer reputation that had started circulating in the 1280s, stemming from the pain of Tubiel's death and the desperation to not be alone, intensified in this new stage of his life (sharing only two traits both stages). Putnam transformed into a brazen seducer, seeking fleeting relationships and avoiding any form of emotional commitment. The saying of a mistress in every port became a reality for him. His defiant attitude and irresistible charm made him the center of attention, captivating women with his charisma and stirring envy among men for his apparent detachment. If someone had placed his future adopted son, Ezeld, and him side by side, they could have sworn they were the same person in different bodies due to how both came to behave.

Putnam's "romantic cocky rebel" not only distanced him from emotional

relationships, but also led him to confront dangerous situations and take unnecessary risks. He became a bold and daring individual, ready to face any challenge with a disdainful smile on his lips. This time, it wasn't driven by a death wish or a desire to be a hero, but simply for the thrill of the experience. Drifting further away from his former image as a committed and responsible witcher, Putnam immersed himself in a carefree and hedonistic lifestyle. However, this time it was intentional, as it didn't stem from the desperation caused by the traumas of being imprisoned and tortured, or to fill the void he experienced during his time in Ofir and Zangvebar.

Despite his new attitude, the emotional scars and memories of his marriage with Aine continued to haunt him at the core of his being. Despite his attempts to conceal it beneath layers of disdain and nonchalance, the shadows of his past still pursued him in moments of solitude. Guilt and remorse remained dormant, serving as constant reminders of the choices that had led to the destruction of his marriage. This became the last obstacle he had to overcome to become the man he would become.

But sooner rather than later, luckily for everyone, this attitude would dissolve as new relationships emerged, with examples like Brynn, Bravri, Elena Hargreaves, among others, being pivotal. The assistance of friends like Adalwulf and Anika Masir also played a role in this realization. Putnam came to realize that he was wrong once again. This transformation culminated in a new marriage, this time with [Enya](#), through which he sought to rectify all his past mistakes with Aine. This new marriage served as a precursor in a way to Jolanta's return (and their subsequent long-lasting marriage at the end of that century).

The Girl from the Ocean (1325 - June 21, 1353)

If something remained from Putnam's marriage with Aine, beyond the regrets and the fact that it indirectly led him to the discovery of the Silk Islands and the Western Continent, it was freeing him from facing the scarcity of monsters on land due to the success his profession had achieved. Instead, Putnam maintained his efforts towards the sea, rivers, and lakes, where monsters were more abundant, as he had done from 1290 to 1300. He focused on safeguarding ships from these potential threats, as he had been doing for the past ten years.

However, that doesn't mean that monsters had disappeared from the land entirely, and Putnam still took on contracts outside of aquatic environments from time to

time. He did so, but he had a preference for the latter. These contracts yielded him sufficient earnings to live comfortably and without many worries. While some monster populations had grown due to the scarcity of witches in the world, they weren't substantial enough to provide him with stable income on The Path. So Putnam chose to leave those contracts to his fellow guild members, focusing his efforts on the lucrative aquatic assignments.

In fact, when Putnam occasionally ventured far from the coast, it was often due to ship journeys along rivers while undertaking a contract to protect the vessel. Alternatively, he would head to areas like Magne, near the border of the Korath Desert, where he knew he would find work eliminating monsters that emerged from that inhospitable corner of the world. As the tales go, he would take bounty hunter contracts along the way, mainly dealing with bandits, to sustain himself until reaching such areas, especially if he wasn't traveling by river.

It was due to this, along with other factors already mentioned, that his attitude remained unchanged until 1325. The exoticism generated by his Silk Islander-origin tattoos, the tan he acquired, and the sun-kissed blond hair resulting from exposure to the sun along the coast and near the desert, caught the eye of more than one woman. However, it must be noted that since his return to Nordling and Nilfgaardian lands, this demeanor had gradually faded, reverting to the Putnam of a few years prior to his divorce with Aine, albeit with a touch more roguishness.

And it was, in fact, thanks to one of these aquatic contracts, that Putnam would meet the woman who would become his fourth wife, Enya. With her, he would enter into his second longest marriage, lasting approximately 25 years. This demonstrated how, despite new traumas, he had overcome the old ones and was becoming stronger and better with each passing day.

This particular contract would take place on the coast of Nazair, in the capital of the Nilfgaardian province established after the destruction of the previous one during the empire's conquest—Nova Assengard, situated along the fertile coast of the region. Putnam headed there after returning from the inland and dispatching a relict that the locals referred to as the "Mantis Man" in Common Tongue, which roamed the province's interior roads, attacking travelers. The payment wasn't substantial, but it was enough to get him to the coast without starving along the way.

It was in the capital where Putnam would come across the aforementioned contract that led him to cross paths with Enya. This contract involved eliminating another relict, for a substantial sum of money. The monster in question was believed to be extinct, at least in the lakes. It was none other than a brosnya, which had mysteriously appeared along the coast after a dreadful storm. This creature had taken to attacking ships to feed on them. Despite all the harpoons and weapons that were brought against it, no ship seemed capable of defeating the formidable monster, and all that tried ended up destroyed. In fact, the brosnya had disrupted naval activity in the province for a significant period of time, escalating the contract into a matter of state concern and hence the offer of a high reward.

What Putnam didn't know at that time (nor did anyone in general, aside from some erudite Higher Vampires and perhaps a few Aen Saevherne) was that the appearance of the brosnya was not coincidental. It was a sign that the spheres were drawing closer, and a Second Conjunction of the Spheres was looming on the horizon, just about 33 years away. Moreover, that storm was a storm influenced by Chaos, which likely brought the monster, the brosnya, through some underwater portal.

Putnam had never faced one before, but he had heard the stories of the young Keldar (because, yes, he had already passed away by then, causing a minor leadership crisis at the School of the Griffin for a while) who had encountered and battled a brosnya in his youth. Putnam decided to trust in the advice of the old witcher, whom he secretly missed despite not admitting it. He drew inspiration from Keldar's tale and combined that wisdom with his own experience in dealing with sea monsters and engaging in underwater combat. He knew that the brosnya was a type of draconid, so he prepared the appropriate oil and set out to find a ship that would take him to the area of the attacks. It proved to be a challenge, given the fear that everyone felt, but eventually, he managed to secure one. He promised the crew that he would give them half of the payment in exchange for their assistance, allowing them to distribute it among themselves as they saw fit.

At first, he considered adopting a tactic similar to what had happened with the Black Demon in Skellige but on purpose. However, upon hearing stories from the few survivors it miraculously spared, he quickly discarded the idea. Instead, he chose the approach that would become a common practice in the future school he would establish: using himself as "bait." He devised a plan to be swallowed by

the monster, intending to kill it from the inside while being supported by the rope he would be attached to. In essence, it was like using a giant fishing rod.

If the deceased Keldar's memory hadn't failed him when he shared the story with Putnam back in the day, the brosnya would possess highly resistant skin. This aligned with reports that not even the ship's harpoons had harmed it. So, without a doubt, the bait strategy was the only option to eliminate it if he wanted to avoid using bombs—a method just as effective if one had the skill to aim accurately, a skill Putnam didn't possess. Nonetheless, he prepared a few bombs just in case, to have them ready within the draconid's belly if the need arose.

What followed was not a battle of grand spectacle, at least not in the poetic sense that often accompanies tales of heroism. Much of the clash unfolded beneath the waves, shrouded in murky obscurity, with sailors peering into the depths only to discern a lengthening and tensing rope. Yet, despite this lack of visual drama, the confrontation was nothing short of spectacular, akin to the famous saying that would resonate across the Northern Kingdoms and Nilfgaard from 1275 onwards: "*a battle of Geralt against Golyat.*"

The battle was startlingly swift, particularly when considering the moment the brosnya took the bait that was the witcher. The encounter continued to unfold as Putnam ventured within the draconid, a necessity to locate and exploit a vulnerable core—a task that led him to target its brain. This endeavor consumed an ample span of the battle's time, ultimately climaxing in a swift dispatch of the monster once Putnam reached its equivalent of a medulla oblongata. This achievement was secured through a series of well-placed, precision slashes executed with his silver sword.

It was a surprisingly swift battle, at least concerning the brosnya taking the "bait" that was the witcher. It extended further when Putnam was inside the monster, as he had to reach a vulnerable area to eliminate it—opting for the brain. This endeavor consumed a considerable amount of time, eventually culminating in his swift dispatching of the creature once he reached its equivalent of a medulla oblongata, achieving this with a few precise slashes of his silver sword. The most perilous part was extricating himself from the dying monster. He nearly got ensnared within as the cord that was his sole escape route came perilously close to snapping in the process. However, thanks to the swift assistance of the sailors, this dire fate was averted. When they observed the water turning crimson and the rope gradually slackening rather than snapping abruptly, they immediately deduced that Putnam was still alive and had triumphed.

Yet, the pinnacle of peril lay in the extraction from the dying behemoth. As Putnam sought to free himself, he risked becoming entangled within its death throes, with the cord that functioned as his sole escape route teetering on the brink of snapping. The situation was precarious, bordering on calamity. However, the prompt intervention of the sailors averted this impending disaster. Observing the water transform into a crimson canvas and the rope gradually slackening instead of snapping or severing abruptly, they intuitively comprehended that Putnam had emerged victorious but required their assistance.

And up to this point, a contract, one could say, usual, until on their way back to the coast, something occurred that would finally mark the beginning of Putnam and Enya's story. A storm akin to the one that had brought the brosnya, a type of tempest that scholars would later classify as a phenomenon inherent to the region of the Great Sea that would come to be known as the Mad Sea after the Second Conjunction. Putnam had experienced much by then, including powerful storms, but nothing quite like that. The survival of the ship until it reached port was nothing short of a miracle.

It was during this storm that Putnam, using his Witcher senses to scan the surroundings, spotted a person struggling in the tumultuous sea. Despite the rope being on the verge of snapping, he quickly secured it once more and launched himself into the tempest to effect a rescue. The sailors warned him of the danger, but Putnam paid no heed. When he reached the person, he found an unconscious young woman—a red-haired individual with blue eyes in her early twenties. This woman would turn out to be none other than Enya.

While she bore the appearance of a typical Nordling, Enya hailed from another world—specifically, Earth—and more precisely, 10th-century Ireland. She had been transported to this new sphere through the very phenomena that signaled the impending Second Conjunction 33 years away, an event closer to occurring than anyone would believe in that time as already said. According to future the legends about her, it is said that Enya ended up in this new sphere, when she tried to travel through time, because she had this ability. Whether this ability that the redhead had was something derived from what elves like the Aen Elle or the Grigori in the [multiverse](#) of days gone by remains a subject of unfettered speculation.

The abrupt transition, plunging into the turbulent sea amidst the storm, caused

Enya to struggle and eventually lose consciousness, despite her proficient swimming skills. When Putnam rescued her, performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to revive her, she briefly regained consciousness. However, she promptly fainted again, utterly fatigued. The sailors offered assistance where they could, but Putnam assured them that not much was required beyond ensuring a comfortable space for Enya. He knew that with his share of the reward, he could provide for her needs during her recovery. His only request was for them to take him and Enya to port—a favor they readily granted, considering their course.

After reaching the safety of the port, Putnam collected the reward and shared half of it with the sailors. He then spent two days caring for the red-haired woman at an inn until she finally regained consciousness. The initial interactions, once she regained consciousness, proved to be intricate (though Putnam had experienced similar situations during Fabio's expeditions, which helped him navigate through it). Both of them were unable to communicate in each other's language. Putnam spoke Common (which in Enya's sphere of origin might be akin to something like the Common Brittonic of the 6th century), while she primarily spoke Old Irish, along with other languages, though none of them were mutually intelligible with Putnam's. This communication problem stemmed from the fact that this wasn't Enya's first leap, although it was her initial dimensional leap that brought her to this new sphere.

Interestingly, Enya's leap to another sphere had stripped her of her powers, which led to several comical yet bittersweet scenes between the two. The language barrier compounded their communication problems, and the moments when Enya attempted to use her powers without any effect were both amusing and poignant, adding a layer of complexity to their budding relationship.

What Enya did understand, from the faint memories of her leap and despite the language barrier, was that the witcher had saved her. For a long time, she tried to communicate her desire to return home, to find a way, but she couldn't convey it. And so, they spent weeks forced to remain by each other's side—Enya because Putnam was quite literally her only possible guide in an unfamiliar world, and Putnam out of a sense of duty. It wouldn't be right to leave the young woman to her own devices, as she might fall prey to bandits or worse. This eventually led to the blossoming of their romantic relationship. Just as in many other tales, affection emerged from proximity. The language barrier also began to fade,

especially after Putnam made the decision to take her as a traveling companion and attempted to act as her teacher, teaching her Common. He succeeded in this task, as Enya, perhaps due to her intelligence, necessity, or both, proved to be a brilliant student who quickly grasped the language. Within three months of their journey together, she was able to formulate moderately complex sentences.

And although there was a certain attraction between them from practically the beginning, this didn't become a tangible reality until they could understand each other at least 70%, which took some time.

And what about Jolanta during that time? Well, Jolanta had also set her sights on the sea, but more specifically on the coasts of the continent due to the abundance of monster nests from nixas and their stronger subspecies, the ekhidnas. These monsters fetched a good price for killing them and destroying their nests, since they caused significant problems for ships trying to dock. However, Jolanta refrained from going further and fighting on the open sea due to her thalassophobia, which she still struggled with but managed better. Unfortunately, they never crossed paths again, but Jolanta heard quite a bit about Putnam. Even though people didn't mention his name directly a lot of times, he was easily recognizable in many ways. This stirred up complex emotions in her, which she chose to ignore at that time instead of confronting them directly.

On his side, Putnam had finally begun to confront his trauma and depression stemming from the disaster that was his divorce with Aine. He was slowly starting to heal, shedding the survival mechanism that had been his "cocky romantic rebel" attitude, which had worn thin over the years. He came to realize that if he had lived through and overcome so much, he could also handle this. Enya played a significant role in this process, especially after their relationship had begun to blossom over the course of several months.

During those months of traveling and gradually developing their relationship, their life was quite similar to the one Putnam had led until then, only now with companionship. Putnam reduced the sea journeys, focusing more on coastlines and rivers due to Enya's trauma of repeating the experience that had brought her to this new world, without the witcher there to rescue her. Nonetheless, there were also other significant changes. One notable aspect, which would play a role in enhancing Putnam's reputation, was Enya's healing abilities. In her previous world, she had been a skilled healer, and a very good one at that. And after adapting to this new world and the native plants that were present, since those

shared by both spheres posed no problems, she began to offer her help to Putnam, healing him when necessary (something that only further encouraged their mutual attraction), be it injuries from bandit or monster attacks, as well as to the people Putnam saved if they were wounded. This contributed to enhancing the witcher's good reputation, eventually leading to his sanctification becoming a reality in the mid-16th century. It was said that he had become a "*protector against darkness*," always accompanied by benevolent spirits. During the time when Enya accompanied him, people often mistook the girl for one of the about-to-be-extinct oreads due to her beauty.

And so, they spent several years traveling together, following the life that Putnam already had, as their relationship deepened, and Enya ceased to be a stranger in that world. She simply became an "adoptee" who integrated better, even though she could never shake the unique accent she possessed when speaking in the Common Tongue. This accent was as striking as the witcher's viperine bi-colored eyes.

By 1328, three years after they had met, Putnam felt more capable of making a new attempt to fulfill the dream of a happy marriage and a quiet life that he had often discussed with the deceased Tubiel, which had turned into a disaster with Aine. Putnam's newfound determination to make this dream successful with Enya prompted them to finally abandon their nomadic lifestyle and settle down. They married shortly after, specifically through the Nilfgaardian rite, as they decided to establish themselves in the south. This decision arose from Enya's desire to escape the harsh winters of the Northern Kingdoms, which she could not endure. In the process, both of them had to convert to the faith of the Great Sun, although they could do it in appearance only, similar to many in the empire. This conversion was necessary in order to qualify for the legal security offered by marriage under Nilfgaardian law, which extended to their vassal states, and to benefit from the tax advantages provided by conversion during the initial years of residence in their chosen location if they were of a different faith. This practice was common throughout the empire, with particular prevalence in the more Nilfgaard-influenced provinces and vassal states, such as the one they decided to settle in.

It took them a long time to make the decision, but eventually, due to a multitude of factors including the climate, geography, the presence of Putnam's friend Adalwulf living in the Nilfgaardian vassal state after joining the School of the Fox, and the ample opportunities for work along the rivers that bordered the duchies

of Roman and Ymlac, they decided to move to Vicovaro. More specifically, they settled in the capital of the same name, where they would spend the entirety of their marriage.

Thus, Enya became Putnam's fourth wife and his redemption, in a manner of speaking, from the mistakes made with the elf from Kerack. This marriage also served as a valuable experience for his subsequent marriage with Jolanta, due to its duration. Enya's marriage to Putnam lasted for 25 years, surpassing the 10 years that the witcher was with Aine.

Putnam and Enya's life in the capital of Vicovaro was quiet and peaceful. There was the occasional startle from time to time when Putnam returned from work, but nothing more. They spent almost the entire year there, except for the summer when, if they could afford it, they would take their vacations in one of the duchies that bordered Vicovaro. In the winter, from time to time, they would visit the fortress of the School of the Fox, [Darn Mylne](#). They were invited often by Adalwulf, whom Putnam began to see more often as they were both relatively close. Their time at the fortress didn't last long anyway, as they usually left before the full winter arrived, returning to the capital.

In fact, it would be because of this that Putnam's greatest contributions to the school would not come until 7 years after Enya's death, and in an indirect way, as a substitute fencing instructor. However, whenever they visited and there was maintenance work to be done at the fortress, Putnam would offer to help without any hesitation. During that time, it was his way of expressing gratitude and compensating the Foxes for their hospitality during their stays.

The 25 years of marriage that followed their establishment and wedding in Vicovaro with Enya unfolded, at least in the first decade, in a manner somewhat similar to Putnam's previous marriage with Aine, yet with key differences scattered here and there. These differences prevented the same tragic ending from befalling this new union, allowing the witcher and the red-haired woman from another sphere to overcome the 20-year barrier together. This ultimately enabled the witcher to fulfill, to a certain extent, his thwarted dream with Tubiel, finally under more favorable circumstances.

And although Putnam and Enya's life was a peaceful and happy marriage, there was an event that marked them, despite being far away, due to the impact it had at the time, with its repercussions felt even in those places that were not directly affected. This event was the Haaki invasion of the Northern Kingdoms in the year

1350. At first, its impact was relatively mild for them, with this impact being nothing more and nothing less than Adalwulf coming to Putnam and Enya's house to try to recruit him to fight against the invaders and join the group of other witches he had gathered to assist the Nordling forces in repelling the eastern invader. Putnam rejected the offer at that time because he didn't want to worry his wife if he went off to war. However, the impact deepened as a result of what would happen later during the invasion.

Haak Invasion of the Northern Kingdoms (1350)

"I'm not sure if it will be the most effective plan, Brianna. But do you have a better idea? What more can we lose than what we've already lost?"

—Anika Masir to Brianna Vassermiller during the Haak Invasion

Delving into the Haaki Invasion of 1350 is a complicated task that would take a lot of time due to its significant impact. However, to summarize, let's say that the Nordling and some of the Nilfgaardian forces (because it affected some provinces of the empire such as Cintra) during the entire year that the destructive invasion lasted had a challenging first six months. This was due to both poor strategies and a lack of unity, which allowed the Haaki forces to easily crush the invaded Nordlings with their two main hordes, namely the Black and the Red, and their sub-horde, the Golden, where the Great Khan of that time, Zeus, along with his advisor, [Herna of Gemmeria](#), were leading and, to a lesser extent, also attacking.

It wouldn't be until the sorceress Brianna Vassermiller, along with other sorceresses like Anika Masir, convinced the Northern kings to stop blaming each other for not stopping the invaders, accept collaboration with the Nilfgaardian army from Cintra, and unite into a single army with what remained of their own forces halfway through the year-long invasion, that things would change in their favor and the Northern Kingdoms would then free themselves from the yoke of being subjugated by an empire worse than the neighboring empire they had, the Haaki Empire, which had already expanded considerably into what the Nordlings called the Far East.

And where does Putnam fit into all of this? Well, before preparing what would lead to victory for the Northern Kingdoms and Cintra against the invaders, the Nordling and Cintrian forces, grouped under what would be known as the Northern Front, turned to diplomatic means. They were so exhausted and demoralized from those disastrous six months of repelling the Haakis that they

preferred to first attempt to reach some agreement with the invaders before shedding more blood.

The matter of the agreement was extensively debated in the various councils held between the kings and the mages (with individuals like Adalwulf, due to his mutant status, being prohibited from participating but acting as an intermediary thanks to Anika, in case the debates became too intense and seemed on the brink of turning physical). However, they made little progress because the kings were unwilling to submit to any empire, whether from the south or the east, and preferred to "die fighting," as they say.

Then, one day, before the upcoming council, while having breakfast with Brianna, Anika remembered Putnam and the stories he told about his time in the Far East, and she had an idea—why not use the witcher as a diplomat? If what Brianna had told her about the Haakis highly valuing those who had saved one of their own was true, and if the chronicles of Fabio about Putnam's feat in saving the then "prince," who was now the Great Khan, were accurate and not an exaggeration, perhaps Putnam could be the key to ending the conflict and reaching a fair agreement that would prevent casualties on both sides.

Unfortunately, Anika's optimism was only partially justified as events would unfold differently than anticipated. Nonetheless, her contributions to the success in repelling the invaders were so significant that the kings of the Northern Kingdoms would eventually bestow upon her the title of "*Lady of the North*."

Although, they took their time, first because it was difficult to convince them, and second because the kings were not willing to let a "mutant" speak on their behalf, so they sent Anika and other mages to look for members who had participated in the expedition to the Far East, who were not, quoting them literally, "a fucking mutant." And so they did, because they had no other choice if they wanted to keep the Northern Front united. Unfortunately, they did not find anyone, as people like Istredd or Eberhatt had been dead for several years, literally on the other side of the world. So in the end, the kings had to yield and accept that Putnam would attempt the diplomatic approach.

Now, the most critical task remained—convincing Putnam. Adalwulf took care of the location, giving people like Anika and Brianna the exact whereabouts of Putnam. However, convincing him was another challenge altogether. Intuition told the Fox witcher that persuading Putnam, who had already rejected their

offer to join the other witches during the initial stages of the invasion, would not be easy. This was especially true given the significant task that the Northern Front had at hand for him. When Putnam was visited by Anika and Brianna, he initially refused again, not because he didn't want to help—of course, he wanted to—but because of his wife, Enya, since he didn't want to leave her alone for several months, let alone for the rest of her life if something happened to him while he went to help against the invasion.

It wasn't until Brianna and one of Adalwulf's sisters, [Eishe of Vicovaro](#), employed their influence that they succeeded in persuading Putnam to cooperate with the Northern Front. He was coerced with the threat of having his house in Vicovaro seized by duke 's orders if he refused to go. Additionally, there was an imperial edict, signed by the Emperor himself, commanding his presence, along with a contingent of soldiers dispatched to his residence to ensure compliance.

As for Jolanta's role during the invasion, she initially maintained a relatively low profile, not actively participating in the conflict until the Haakis reached Novigrad and laid siege to the city. However, her circumstances underwent a significant change after the siege concluded with the defeat of the Redanian forces and the tragic loss of her own home, which was consumed by flames.

In response to these dire circumstances, Jolanta made the pivotal decision to join the Redanian army as a mercenary. Her motivation was driven by a desire to contribute her skills and combat prowess to the cause, aiming to assist in the defense of the Northern Realms against the Haaki invasion. Over time, she transitioned from her role as a mercenary to becoming an integral part of the Northern Front forces, dedicating herself to the larger battle against the Haakis.

Notably, Anika and Brianna, aware of Jolanta's prior relationship with Putnam and seeking to enlist his diplomatic assistance, made efforts to persuade her to accompany them on their mission to bring Putnam into the fold. They hoped that her connection to Putnam would prove valuable in convincing him to participate in their diplomatic efforts, given that Anika had heard about Jolanta through Putnam shortly before the events of 1288.

However, Jolanta declined their invitation, offering as her rationale the belief that her involvement would likely exacerbate the already delicate situation surrounding the Griffin's cooperation. She argued that her presence might hinder rather than help the cause, and she preferred to remain in a more discreet and anonymous role, contributing to the war effort in whatever capacity she

could. This often involved participating in covert infiltration missions with the goal of assassinating high-value Haaki military targets, including the generals leading the Black Horde and the Red Horde.

After bringing Putnam and explaining his mission, the plan unfolded with the initial step of sending an emissary. This emissary's primary objective was to demand a cessation of hostilities for the purpose of initiating negotiations. The Great Khan surprisingly accepted this proposition, initially believing it to be a precursor to a formal surrender and the subsequent establishment of terms.

Following this, Putnam was dispatched along with Adalwulf and Eishe for added protection. What transpired next appeared, at first glance, to be an amicable encounter between Putnam and the Great Khan Zeus. Their meeting had the air of a reunion between old friends who hadn't crossed paths in a considerable amount of time. However, as the conversation progressed, the atmosphere gradually shifted from conviviality to tension.

Putnam began to introduce critical issues into the discussion, including the proposal of a just and equitable agreement that would serve the interests of both sides. He also suggested that the Haakis should withdraw to their eastern origins, thereby leaving the Northern Realms in a state of peace. This transformation of the conversation turned what had initially seemed like a friendly chat into a confrontation.

In an unexpected twist, the Great Khan rejected these conditions vehemently and resorted to threatening Putnam, Adalwulf, and Eishe. Faced with this dire situation, they had no alternative but to make a swift escape before they could be dispatched by Zeus's personal guards.

Tragically, this endeavor to secure peace concluded in disaster and it left the Northern Front in a more precarious situation, struggling to fend off the invaders due to the considerable material losses they had sustained and the defeats they had experienced earlier in the conflict.

After the failure to attempt to achieve peace through diplomatic means, Putnam was allowed to return to Vicovaro, but he refused. Seeing the dire situation of the Northern Front, the witcher decided to help in any way he could. Not only did he feel indebted for the failed peace attempt, but he also felt it was his duty, despite the fears he had that Enya might end up alone. New fears arose after witnessing the destruction caused by the Haakis, and the mere thought of them reaching Vicovaro and laying it to waste sent shivers down his spine. That's why he felt he

had to stay with the Northern Front and prevent the invasion from advancing further south.

Subsequent to the initial six months of only losses for the Northern Front, a fluctuating series of minor defeats and victories unfolded. These triumphs played a pivotal role in elevating the soldiers' morale and refining their organizational capabilities. Gradually, they adapted to the enemy's tactics, though they remained in a precarious position. Nonetheless, the fact that they managed to maintain their defensive stance without incurring significant losses marked a notable accomplishment.

A critical element contributing to these victories was the intervention of pirates hailing from the Skellige Islands. These seafarers thwarted the Haakis' attempts to take to the open waters for their conquest endeavors. Consequently, the Haakis found themselves increasingly confined to land, providing an opportunity for the Northern Front to launch surprise attacks utilizing the region's intricate network of navigable rivers with the pirates' help. This strategy turned the tables on the Haakis, subjecting them to unexpected assaults and further complicating their situation.

What eventually would lead to, once the troops' morale was at its peak, was an idea conceived by Adalwulf, and which would ultimately grant them victory. It was a risky plan – luring the Haaki forces to a single point and defeating them there. They faced danger, yes, and they didn't have the advantage, not only in numbers but also in equipment. However, it could work if the terrain was right, and there was no better place for it than the mountainous region of Mahakam. To execute this plan, they had to convince the dwarves, but it posed no problem as they too had been affected by what they called the "easterners" and wanted to give them what they deserved. The dwarves joined the Northern Front, giving rise to the Second Mahakam Volunteer Army as part of the forces. This move proved crucial in not only replenishing their losses in terms of manpower but also equipment, as the dwarves made all their resources available to the united Nordling and Cintrian armies.

This set the stage for what would later be known in history as the Battle of Mahakam, which ended with a Nordling victory and the expulsion of the Haakis from the Northern Realms after a year of invasion. It was after the dwarves joined the Northern Front that Putnam would once again reunite with Roth after several years apart. In this last battle of the invasion, he once again saved Roth's life, reinforcing not only the life debt the dwarf owed to the witcher but also their

friendship.

It's worth noting that the dwarves' contribution to the expulsion of the Haakis was so significant that it left a lasting impact on Nordling history. This finally put an end to years of discrimination against dwarves, elevating them from second-class citizens to full-fledged citizens alongside humans. This represented a significant advancement in the Nordling mindset. This shift in attitudes would prove pivotal for subsequent events, such as the colonization of the Silk Islands and the Western Continent by the Nordlings, in which the dwarves played a crucial role.

And now, questions arise: Did Jolanta and Putnam reunite after so many years? The answer is both yes and no, as their situation is rather complex. We will delve into their story later.

Returning to the final battle against the Haakis in Mahakam, this significant confrontation occurred, to be precise, in mid-September. By this time, the Northern Front, as previously mentioned, had bolstered its strength significantly compared to the earlier part of the year. They were determined to take the daring gamble of luring all the Haaki troops to the region to eliminate them once and for all. Although the risks had been minimized thanks to the strategically chosen terrain and the invaluable assistance of the dwarves, there was still an underlying sense of danger. The battle was grueling but undoubtedly worthy of being retold by bards in the years to come. In this case, it evoked the saying from Toussaint: "*a battle of Geralt against Golyat*." However, in this instance, Geralt was battling with half his strength, having only partially recovered from his injuries, but he was better prepared for the next round of combat.

From this battle, many heroes emerged, including the one who conceived the audacious plan to lure the Haakis there, Adalwulf, along with Anika (accompanied by the other mages, like Brianna for example), and unexpected individuals like Roth, Putnam, and Cervin. Among these heroic figures, Anika and the mages distinguished themselves by accomplishing a feat that might even rival the achievements of the heroes of Sodden, both those who had perished and those who survived later on. This remarkable feat involved the partial control of an [Ifrit](#), a resource that Anika had obtained through a dwarf merchant who had acquired the genie before the invasion. This control of the Ifrit played a pivotal role in weakening the invading Haaki troops, contributing significantly to their ultimate defeat.

Explaining the battle in detail would be too extensive, so it's best to summarize it as much as possible. The first part of it involved offering the Haakis a bait, making them believe that Mahakam was empty and ripe for plunder, much like luring a mouse into a trap with a piece of cheese. They let the Haakis become overconfident while positioning themselves in one of the narrow passages within the vassal state of Temeria, waiting to catch them off guard when they eventually passed through. This strategy prevented the Haakis from maneuvering in open terrain, which was a significant advantage for them due to the plains and hills in their homeland. Interestingly, although it was later referred to as the Battle of Mahakam, it was not because it occurred in the dwarf state but because it took place in the pass of the same name.

In the second phase, as you can imagine, the plan involved releasing the Ifrit and attempting to control it so that it would exclusively target the Haaki troops. However, a significant challenge arose due to the narrow terrain, making this task exceedingly difficult, if not virtually impossible. This is where Roth's act of bravery or recklessness (depending on one's perspective) came into play.

The initial strategy was to initiate the battle, gradually compel the Haakis to retreat, and then, just as they were about to exit the pass, release the Ifrit to unleash devastation upon the enemy forces. However, the red-haired dwarf had different ideas. He expedited the process to prevent the battle from taking a turn for the worse, setting a rapid pace and demoralizing the Haakis in the process.

As the battle teetered on the brink of commencing, with the two armies facing each other, the dwarf, a member of the Second Mahakam Volunteer Army, boldly defied his superiors' orders and, without a moment's hesitation, threw himself into the fray. This indirectly compelled Putnam, who was on the front lines, to follow suit. Like the other Witchers who had joined the Northern Front, Putnam had been assigned to a specific army for enhancement. On this particular day, he found himself on the front line of attack/defense alongside the dwarves. Putnam joined Roth in the thick of the battle, attempting to save him, and they fought side by side.

This unexpected and daring action proved to be a powerful source of inspiration for the Northern Front troops as they witnessed that neither the dwarf, neither the witcher had perished, contrary to the initial fears of many, and they observed them not only defending themselves but also defeating several Haakis. This struck terror into the hearts of the enemy, who couldn't fathom why their adversaries remained unbroken.

This pivotal moment prompted the entire Northern Front armies to fully engage in the battle, advancing faster than the original plan mentioned earlier. This allowed Anika and the other mages to release the Ifrit and partially control it briefly, as they noticed the Haaki troops fleeing from the pass and the armies of the Northern Front retreating far enough to avoid significant harm. Some mages fell in the process of controlling the Ifrit, but their sacrifice was not in vain. The genie enabled the elimination of more troops from the various Haaki hordes and instilled more terror in the Haakis, causing the hordes to disperse into different smaller groups.

This paved the way for the third part of the plan, which, thanks to the motivation the soldiers received from Roth and Putnam, was executed flawlessly. The objective was to hunt down the various groups of Haaki troops that had scattered throughout Mahakam.

But obviously, life is no fairy tale, and Putnam, although he fought valiantly and managed to demoralize the Haakis troops alongside the dwarf, did not emerge unscathed like a hero from a play. Sooner rather than later, he succumbed in combat, impaled by several Haakis swords. Remarkably, he did not meet his demise, thanks to his slow pulse, a result of his witcher mutations. However, he found himself in a dire state, akin to Coën in Brenna, but with the fortunate twist of surviving, in stark contrast to the fate suffered by the other member of the School of the Griffin. Putnam, no less, was rescued from the battlefield by Jolanta, who swiftly came to his aid upon spotting him in the distance among the fallen. In fact, Jolanta's prompt actions played a pivotal role in his survival. On the other hand, Roth also fell in battle, but his injuries were comparatively less severe than Putnam's, making him easier to attend to.

And thus, the future founders of the School of the Crane would come together once more. However, as previously mentioned on several occasions, life, in all its cruelty, would once again keep them apart, at least for another 31 years. Why, you might wonder? Well, the reason is quite straightforward. Even though Putnam would ultimately survive, the doctors and surgeons who tirelessly worked to save his life would make a grave error by mistakenly declaring him clinically dead. When they broke this devastating news to Jolanta, who was the sole witness present at that moment, anxiously hoping for a positive outcome, the shock was so profound that, together with the circumstances he had lived through up to that time, it plunged her into a deep depression. This, combined with the subsequent events in Putnam's life, would keep them separated until

the fateful year of 1381 finally brought them back together. In fact, as a curious note, it was thanks to Adalwulf that Putnam was spared from being buried alive when the other witcher using his senses checked that he still had a pulse.

After that act, which many would describe as "foolishly heroic," Putnam, along with other individuals, was bestowed with titles for their bravery in defending the Northern Kingdoms from the invaders. Most of them received knighthood titles, specifically one created for that time, known as the "*Knight of the North*" (or "*Lady of the North*" in the cases of sorceresses like Anika Masir). Many of them accepted the title with honor and underwent a proper ceremony. However, others, like Putnam, who was still recovering from his near-death experience, accepted it while lying on a stretcher, somewhat dazed from the medication administered, and simply went along with it.

There were also exceptional cases, such as Cervin, who declined the knighthood title in exchange for granting what he considered his adopted sister, Brianna Vassermiller permission to build in Ebbing, which would later become known as Torr Gáidh.

Enya's Farewell

The marriage between Enya and Putnam could have lasted much longer, but unfortunately, Enya passed away in her sleep on June 21, 1353, at the age of fifty, due to natural causes. In contrast to other times, the witcher mourned peacefully, with little pain, as he knew it was what she would have wanted. He held onto all that she had given him during their marriage, rather than dwelling on missing her, understanding that such feelings would be futile.

But returning to their time together, considering these mentioned differences, which were subtle yet crucial factors, it must be noted that Enya's personality was very distinct from Aine's. In essence, they could be considered two opposite poles, despite sharing certain traits like compassion and kindness. This contrast, combined with the changes Putnam made, prevented their relationship from deteriorating over the years. On the contrary, their bond grew stronger. Even in the face of the challenge posed by their biological differences when it came to aging, their relationship flourished.

Enya held the belief that although her time in existence might be shorter, being with the witcher was as precious as all the gold in this new world of hers. Putnam, on his side, had rekindled and evolved the same sentiment he held when he was with Tubiel, but now applied it to Enya. In essence, their

perspectives were quite similar, both valuing their time together as the most precious gift. Thus, they embraced each day with the spirit of "Carpe Diem" – seizing the moment – making the most out of their shared time.

After Enya's death, Putnam returned to the life he had partially left 25 years ago, and fully immersed himself once again in The Path, taking contracts to protect ships from aquatic monsters, and occasionally, some inland contracts whenever the opportunity arose. This opportunity had increased due to the devastation left by the Haaki invasion of 1350, which had made the Northern Kingdoms and some vassal states and Nilfgaardian provinces to the north of Vicovaro fertile grounds for ghouls and other necrophages.

He continued to use the house he had in the duchy as a refuge during the winters, until he gradually abandoned it in favor of returning to Kaer Seren due to the nostalgia it brought for the home he had shared with Enya for so long before her passing. He finally sold it in 1357, using the money, along with the funds obtained from his time in Zangvebar, for hiring personnel and establishing the fortress for the School of the Crane.

Second Conjunction of the Spheres (1358)

As the realities

converged once again,

Putnam found himself navigating the event with a mixture of emotions that mirrored those of any ordinary person. On one hand, there was a sense of joy permeating through him, knowing that the witchers would regain their purpose, avoiding complete extinction, and garnering the respect they deserved. On the other hand, a deep-seated concern gnawed at him, contemplating the implications for both the present and future denizens of The World.

Throughout that year, and for however long the phenomenon endured, Putnam, like many of his fellow witchers, relentlessly battled against the onslaught of new and familiar monsters that emerged. Often, the chaos was so profound that compensation became an afterthought, relying solely on the gratitude of those he aided. These selfless acts, in conjunction with previous endeavors, propelled him further along the path to sanctification that awaited him in the afterlife.

During that same pivotal year, just before the Ard Gaeth portal in the Mad Sea was sealed, destiny wove another chapter into Putnam's tale. He was reunited with Aine, his ex-wife, a decision born of the same yearning for a better world

that led many elves to depart. A letter from Aine reached him, a testament to the profound bond they shared, as the witcher was the only family known by the elf due to the previously mentioned death of her parents in a pogrom. Without hesitation, Putnam made his way to Kerack, where they reconnected after decades of separation.

In those hallowed moments, hours melted away as they conversed, reconciled, and forgave each other for the stumbles of the past. They reminisced about the golden threads of their marriage, the memory of Frey, and ultimately found solace in each other's arms. As night unfurled its inky wings, they stood side by side on the port's edge, engaging in a final exchange of words and a lingering kiss. With a heavy heart, Aine boarded the ship, leaving Putnam to bear the weight of their farewell alone. He remained on the quay, under the silvery glow of moon and stars, grappling with the enormity of what might have been.

In the quiet moments that followed, tears welled up, a silent tribute to the dreams that had danced on the precipice of reality. But Putnam, by that time, was not one to linger in sorrow. He brushed away the glistening trails, a symbol of resilience, and turned his gaze once more to The Path. With each step, he forged ahead, a stoic figure against the backdrop of a world in flux, guided by the echoes of his past and the promise of an unwritten, but better future.

"Healing the old wounds" (1360)

In the wake of the Second Conjunction, Putnam's role as a witcher took on even greater significance, with demand for his skills reaching unprecedented levels. Alongside his monster-hunting endeavors, he assumed a new mantle as an instructor during the frigid winters spent within the walls of Kaer Seren. Focusing primarily on the art of fencing, Putnam displayed a remarkable proficiency in this discipline, earning admiration from those under his tutelage.

The surviving schools, like the Foxes, that had weathered the tumultuous events of the 13th century, as well as the rebuilt schools such as the Griffins and the Vipers, experienced a resurgence. They ramped up production, no longer adhering to the slow trickle of witchers seen in the past, particularly with the Griffins since the 1250s. Instead, they answered the surging demand by churning out witchers in substantial quantities.

In the initial two decades following the Second Conjunction, a transitional period for the emergence of the new post-Conjunction generations, the need for

experienced witches to pass on their knowledge to the fledgling recruits was paramount. They were tasked with a dual mission: to train the next wave of witches and to take on contracts, despite the witcher scarcity in numbers, in order to assist humanity in its struggle against monsters.

Putnam's ability to strike a balance between his instructive role and his hunting duties was a testament to his adaptability and dedication. His winters at the fortress were marked by rigorous training sessions, while the rest of the year was devoted to the relentless pursuit of his witcher responsibilities.

Notably, Putnam's newfound passion for instruction would prove instrumental in shaping his destiny. It was during his stay in Darn Mylne in the year 1360 that he drew nearer to becoming the grandmaster of the school he would found, the School of the Crane, in parallel with Jolanta, whom he would also reunite with in that year, although not being able to be with her due to what would happen.

This would happen, then, starting from a day like any other, when Putnam decided, taking advantage of the fact that he was in Gemmeria and heading further south, setting course for his beloved Vicovaro. There in Vicovaro, more specifically in the capital of the same name as the duchy, he would reunite with his old friend Adalwulf, whom he hadn't seen for 10 years, that is, since the Haaki Invasion. After this, due to multiple factors, neither of them had had time to meet in person. Adalwulf had been busy training the new generations of Fox witches, and Putnam had been occupied with various things, although they had continued to correspond with each other.

Adalwulf was on an excursion with the youngest students from the Fox School when this encounter took place. Everything was proceeding as usual, and it seemed to be a day like any other, but with a pleasant surprise of Putnam arriving from a basilisk contract he had taken on. Adalwulf was explaining to the kids accompanying him about these monsters, taking advantage of the terminated contract by his friend. That's when a terrorist attack struck the capital, using fire magic.

The attack was catastrophic, causing several deaths and hundreds of injuries, including some students. After recovering and assisting the civilians, as well as burying the dead, Adalwulf would inform Eishe of Vicovaro, who would take the students to a safe place, and Oca from Toussaint, to handle the basic training of the students for the time he would be away, as that crime could not go unpunished. Putnam, on his part, as a friend and loyal Griffin, would join him,

and both would spend a few months investigating the mysterious attack. During this time, their friendship would strengthen and grow even closer than before, with Jolanta joining them later. Because the investigations she was conducting into various murders committed against the remaining members of the School of the Cat would lead her to the same place where the Griffin and the Fox had ended up.

They began the investigation with a magical trace, conducted by Eishe, which led them to Rowan.

After what had happened and an arduous investigation, both witchers set out for the duchy of Rowan, following the magical trail that the magical attack had generated. This led them to Darn Rowan, where they discovered that there had been a prison riot and several political prisoners had escaped. Among them were some mages who did not agree with the imperial directives. And just like other experiences the witcher had lived through, it was more than likely that they would stage a coup d'état, which both witchers would try to stop. Because the chaos would be worse than the current order. Although the reality, as they would discover, would turn out to be much worse than that.

Not knowing which way to go, both witchers after discussing it for a while, decided that if they could find a clue as to where the criminals might be and their true objectives (since Putnam's was only speculation) they marched to Nilfgaard Capital, more specifically, to its "*Underworld*" thanks to a mysterious contact of Thaikric who had been introduced to Adalwulf back in the day. This mysterious contact turned out to be none other than Jolanta from their time working for the Redanian Intelligence Service. Jolanta was also planning to go to the underworld of the imperial capital to continue her investigation into the murders of the Cat Witchers. So, when they asked for her help, she agreed to join them after explaining what had happened and that three of them were going after the same criminal or criminals. It's worth noting that the reunion between Putnam and her was somewhat awkward, not because they had issues between them, but because Jolanta found it hard to believe she was seeing him alive again, something she had believed to be impossible (even though it was clearly mistaken)

Once they were in the city, thanks to Jolanta, they managed to access the underworld, the less "shiny" part of the city. Having to go to a place of clandestine fights, visited by mages, supposing that perhaps, these mages, could be the ones who had escaped and were there, trying to earn money to be able to

escape from the empire to distant lands.

At the site of the clandestine fights, at first, the three witches could not get the information diplomatically, so they were forced to team up and fight for it, resulting in a somewhat costly victory, but finding out what they wanted. It was that these mages had been arrested not only for political reasons, for attempting against several important figures of the empire, but also for religious reasons, since they were worshiping a mysterious being known as Dagon, offering him blood sacrifices in the coast of Ebbing.

After compiling the gathered information, Adalwulf seized the opportunity to elucidate to Putnam and Jolanta who Dagon was and engage in speculation with them concerning the individuals responsible for the unfolding situation. These individuals were undoubtedly mages, but the pertinent questions loomed large: who were they, and why were they intent on harnessing Dagon's power? Adalwulf, did not believe that they worshiped him just because, after all, they were mages. They always thought of themselves first. Jolanta for her part, like many others, possessed only a cursory familiarity with [Dagon](#), primarily through the recounting of Geralt of Rivia's epic confrontation with the entity. Putnam's knowledge, on the other hand, was restricted to the mere mention of Dagon during his harrowing period of captivity and torment.

It was precisely due to these limited insights that, notwithstanding the apprehension that coursed through him, Putnam resolved not to relinquish his pursuit of the investigation. A growing suspicion gnawed at him, suggesting that the orchestrators of this enigma might have a connection to his own flesh and blood, perhaps even his elusive twin brother. With relentless determination, he continued to delve deeper into the mystery, and in time, his suspicions were validated – he had not erred in his intuition.

After the revelation, the group found themselves at a crossroads, a division driven primarily by Jolanta's talassophobia. They made their way towards Ebbing, each member pursuing their own path. Adalwulf, opting for a sea voyage, aimed to reach the vassal state of Nilfgaard faster. He chose this route over asking one of his sisters to conjure a portal, a decision influenced by the potential complications that could arise from the traces such magic left behind.

Once in Ebbing, Adalwulf settled into the wait for the others, utilizing the generous span of time to delve deeper into the investigation. His determination to track down the elusive mages burned brightly, fueled by a resolute sense of

purpose. Each lead followed, each piece of the puzzle uncovered, brought him closer to the heart of the matter.

And by the time Putnam and Jolanta arrived, they had already made considerable progress, having located the magicians, as well as proof of their plans. Indeed, it seemed that their leader, whose identity was unknown (but indeed, he turned out to be Putnam's twin brother, Mimit), intended, by means of different types of sacrifices, to "help" together with the sect that had armed the Vodynai in the reanimation of Dagon. All of this was with the objective of capturing the entity and taking that ancestral power for his benefit.

At first, Mimit had tried to do so by physically torturing Putnam mentally, leaving him in a catatonic state in which he could manipulate him at will. This was because Putnam, although not a mage, was a Source, and Mimit needed a catalyst not to die in the process due to power of Dagon and since that was a greater challenge than controlling an Ifrit. Now, he did not have Putnam, because he had considered him a failed experiment. He had taken advantage of all those years to investigate, convince, and deceive mages who turned out to be powerful Sources to achieve his goal with the least possible risk (because with Putnam in his day, he had risked more, since he was only one).

It would be during this journey to Ebbing on horseback that Putnam and Jolanta found themselves not only crossing land but also traversing the corridors of their shared history. The initial awkwardness of their reunion, after a decade of separation, and one of them supposedly being dead, gradually gave way to a familiar comfort as they fell into step with each other once more.

The passage of time had not extinguished the embers of their connection; instead, it seemed to have stoked the flames. There was a magnetic pull between them, an unspoken understanding that defied the years apart. Yet, despite the palpable undercurrent of longing, they both knew that circumstances had changed. Jolanta, committed to another, held a steadfast loyalty to her current relationship. It was a fact she gently acknowledged to Putnam, weaving it into their conversations with a sense of both tenderness and firmness.

This revelation was a bittersweet truth, a reminder that the currents of life had taken them in different directions. And so, they journeyed to Ebbing in a delicate dance of rekindled friendship and repressed desires. The unspoken acknowledgment of their shared history hung in the air, an invisible thread that bound them together, even as they trod carefully around its edges. But

eventually, that taut thread would loosen again, bringing them together, if only for a brief moment.

After the three of them had gathered and prepared themselves, they set a course to where the mages were, according to the information Adalwulf had obtained. The evidence that Adalwulf gathered led them to a concealed lair nestled deep within a network of ancient caves on the coast.

The journey through the caves was fraught with danger. The air grew heavy with the scent of damp earth and saltwater, and the sound of crashing waves echoed through the narrow passages. Putnam led the way, with Jolanta following closely, her movements precise and graceful, while Adalwulf provided strategic guidance, having dealt with situations like this before.

As they ventured deeper into the labyrinthine caverns, the atmosphere grew increasingly oppressive. The walls seemed to close in around them, and the distant echoes of their footsteps reverberated eerily. The mages had clearly gone to great lengths to conceal their lair. Finally, they reached the inner sanctum probably from Vodynai or Vran origin, a massive chamber with an altar at its center. Mimit stood there, his face obscured by a hood, surrounded by his loyal followers and some vodynai. The air was charged with ancient magic, crackling and humming with an unsettling power.

Putnam's heart pounded in his chest as he confronted the brother who had created so many of the nightmares that had haunted him for years. Mimit's eyes gleamed with a sinister intelligence, and a cruel smile played at the corners of his lips. He raised his hands, preparing to unleash a devastating spell, but Jolanta was faster.

With a swift, precise movement, she flung a dagger coated with a powerful poison at Mimit. The blade struck true, piercing Mimit's heart before he could complete his incantation. His eyes widened in shock, and he crumpled to the ground, life draining from his body. The mages around him screamed in agony as the poison spread, their spells unraveling.

The chamber descended into chaos. Spells ricocheted off the walls, lighting up the chamber in blinding flashes of light. Putnam, Jolanta and Adalwulf fought side by side, their movements synchronized in a deadly dance. In the midst of the chaos, Putnam's thoughts raced. He watched as his brother's life force ebbed away, and a mix of emotions surged within him. Relief washed over him, mingling with grief and a profound sense of closure. The source of so much pain

and suffering was no more.

Jolanta's presence at his side was a steadfast anchor. Together, they pushed back against the onslaught of magic, their determination unwavering. With a final surge of energy, they overcame the remaining mages and vodynais, leaving the chamber eerily silent in the aftermath.

Exhausted but victorious, the three of them stood amidst the fallen foes. The weight of the moment for Putnam and Jolanta hung heavy in the air, a culmination of years of struggle and sacrifice. Putnam turned to Jolanta, a mixture of gratitude and awe in his eyes. She had saved him, not just in this confrontation, but in a deeper sense, from some of the most terrible specters of his traumatic past that, even after so much time, having overcome so much on his own and having gained more strength, still haunted him like echoes of a bygone era.

However, Putnam's victory came at a cost. He was badly wounded during the battle, and as the adrenaline faded, the pain became overwhelming. They quickly made their way out of the caverns, back to the surface. Once they were safe, they realized that Putnam's injuries were severe, and he needed immediate medical attention, which became evident after the wounds caused him to fall into a coma. So after that, Adalwulf contacted one of his sisters, and the three of them marched to Burov Mylne using a portal.

Winter stay in Burov Mylne

“Don't be too harsh on the young ones, they're kids after all. Remember, reading about far-off lands and mysterious monsters in Fabio's books is one thing, but hearing about them from someone who's experienced them firsthand is entirely different. Share your tales with them, it'll make them better Witchers in the long run.”

—Adalwulf to Putnam during one of his dice poker games in **Burov Mylne** during the winter of 1360.

At **Burov Mylne**, Putnam remained in a coma for approximately two weeks. He was cared for by several people, among them Eishe and Arrah, Birrex of Poviss, Jolanta, and Adalwulf himself. During those long days and nights, the atmosphere was heavy with worry and uncertainty. Jolanta rarely left his side, her presence a soothing balm to the chaos that raged within Putnam's battered body. Since they had reunited, he had intended to have a conversation with her about the complex tangle of emotions that had resurfaced between them.

However, when the moment came, and he awoke, though not fully recovered, words seemed inadequate. Instead, Jolanta, in a moment of vulnerability and desire, conveyed her feelings through touch and caresses, igniting a passionate encounter that transcended the confines of speech.

In the hushed hours of that night, as the world outside Burov Mylne faded into obscurity, their union was an affirmation of longing and desire, a respite from the relentless turmoil of their lives. However, this passionate liaison bore unintended consequences. In the dawning light of the following day, Jolanta, overwhelmed by guilt and a stark realization of her actions, quietly departed without uttering a word. Putnam awoke to find her gone, a hollow ache in his chest, and the weight of unresolved emotions hanging over him.

As time passed, Putnam slowly mended, but the scars ran deeper than the physical wounds. He grappled with the aftermath of their passionate encounter, questioning the choices they had both made in that fragile moment. It was a bittersweet memory, a reminder of what he thought could never be.

By the time Putnam was fit enough to leave his sickbed, the first snows of winter had blanketed the region. Adalwulf, recognizing that the bitter Kovir winters would be unforgiving to a weakened witcher, convinced Putnam to stay with the Foxes for the season. Putnam agreed, and he spent that winter at Burov Mylne.

It was a tranquil and mild winter, a stark contrast to the harsh weather of Kovir. Among the Foxes, Putnam found solace and camaraderie. He caught up with Birrex and forged new friendships within the tight-knit community. His days were filled with helping wherever he could, from tending to the fortress's needs to assisting with the training of young witchers. Many evenings, as daylight waned and the hearth's warmth enveloped them, he would engage in spirited games of dice poker with Adalwulf, the clattering of dice and jovial banter filling the air.

In addition to these pursuits, Putnam occasionally substituted for some of the teachers when necessary, sharing his knowledge and skills with the next generation of witchers. The bond he formed with the Foxes was akin to family, a connection that would later play a significant role in the founding of the School of the Crane.

With the arrival of spring, the world outside began to thaw and come to life. Putnam knew it was time to continue his journey. He expressed his deep

gratitude to the Foxes for their hospitality and friendship, thanking them for their unwavering support during his time of need. And with heartfelt farewells, he once again set his sights back into the Northen Kingdoms.

The School of the Crane (1380)

“Why don't you give it a go at least, Putnam? Even if you don't believe it, you've got the makings of a leader. Hm... Not a bad throw, my friend. But I believe I win this round.”

—Adalwulf to Putnam during the winter of 1360

After what happened in 1360, Putnam and Jolanta would remain separated for another 21 years. This was due to a multitude of reasons, with the main one being their work. The high demand for their services as witchers and the scarcity of new ones (since the new generations were still in training) kept them busy traveling from one place to another on paths that would never cross, trying to meet that demand as much as possible. Gradually, they tried to forget each other (something that proved impossible), believing that the red thread that bound their lives was parallel and not destined to cross, except when some mysterious force decided to force it. But both were very wrong, as two decades and one year later, they would finally be together, only separating almost at the end of their lives, after 120 years of marriage, when death claimed one of them before the other.

Being their marriage the water that the School of Crane needed to germinate, but first we need more context on how the idea of the school itself came about and how it became a reality.

Going back quite a long time, the idea of a school of witchers specializing in aquatic and aerial monsters had been on Putnam's mind for a long time. Specifically, since his time in Skellige in 1277, where he faced multiple both aquatic and flying monsters. However, this idea remained just that, a vague thought. The idea resurfaced during Fabio Sachs' expeditions to the Far East and Far North, but similar to Skellige, it remained a persistent yet still vague idea. Finally, it began to take shape after settling in Kerack in 1290, and gained more substance after Fabio Sachs' expedition that discovered the Silk Islands and the Western Continent. However, it only began to have a clear form after his winter in Burov Mylne in 1360, where Adalwulf, through long and deep conversations combined with their usual games of Dice Poker at that time, managed to convince him that he had what it takes to not only lead, but also found a school

of witches. Planting the seed of conviction in Putnam's mind, which would lead to, 20 winters later, the School of the Crane becoming a reality.

During those two decades that followed, Putnam would start refining the details of his idea for the school here and there. Although Adalwulf had largely convinced him, there were still doubts about whether he would be a good leader and teacher beyond sword instruction. Furthermore, while the idea of specialization was present in his mind, there were also doubts about whether it was the right approach, as witches traditionally did not specialize in specific types of monsters, but rather covered a wide variety of threats. It wouldn't be until the year 1380 that those doubts would dissipate. With the onset of Nordling colonization of the Silk Islands and the Western Continent, reports of ships being sunk by sea monsters while attempting to reach the New World became increasingly common, revealing a significant demand (and moreover, a necessary one for world progress) that no school of witches had dared to address, at least, properly. It was then that Putnam realized that founding a school of witches specialized in protecting ships traveling from the Old Continent to the New World was not a bad idea at all, and that his doubts were unfounded.

Making it so that, indeed, that very year, without a second thought, he set off for the New World to carry it out. He didn't do it without first recruiting friends like Charz, Jabolet, and Roth in the process, who were crucial for the start of the school, as well as obtaining certain things that were necessary for it to emerge under proper conditions. Charz would be the sword instructor, as Putnam would be very busy with his duties as grandmaster. Jabolet would take on the role of the mage in charge of carrying out the mutations of the witches, using as a basis those from the School of the Griffin, of which Putnam had obtained a copy before leaving after making one last visit to Kaer Seren. Roth, on the other hand, would become the first blacksmith (as well as cook) of the school, responsible for designing and crafting items like the medallions and swords that this future witches would use. Although it was clear that sooner rather than later, they would have to bring in more personnel if they truly wanted to make it work. Something they did, but only once Jolanta joined and truly got things off the ground.

Furthermore, it was an opportune moment, as life was smiling upon the witcher. By that time, the contract he had signed with the Zammorto bank, which limited his ability to withdraw money from his account, had expired. Following this, he

gained access to vast wealth, derived not only from the accrued interests in his account, but also from what he had acquired and deposited into the account, such as the wealth he obtained during his time in Zangvebar, for example. This wealth allowed him to fund both the design and the construction of the future fortress.

With Putnam settling and establishing the fortress where the school would be, in Hawaiki, the main of the Silk Islands. And why did he choose this location? Well, it's simple. If he was going to provide the world with witchers who would roam the seas protecting ships between the Old Continent and the Western Continent, the islands were a perfect choice due to their geographical position.

Furthermore, aside from that, he believed he had found the perfect place for the fortress while thoroughly reviewing his memories during the long ship journey. This place was where he had lived during the time when Fabio's expedition stayed in the Silk Islands. Nothing more and nothing less than the Sachs Mountains, more specifically, the place where he had once had the house he built with Creti in those four years when, along with the other expedition members, he was forced to survive while repairing their ships.

And is there a clear origin as to why Putnam chose the Crane as the symbol for the school, and not another animal or even monster? Well, in fact, there is. And unlike other origins, such as that of the School of the Griffin, given by their extermination of griffins in the mountains of Kovir, this one is not epic, but rather, one could even say, boring. Simply put, During the extended ship journey to the New World, Putnam found himself reminiscing about one of his past loves, the pirate, Kai Yih. In these quiet moments, his mind drifted to a particular memory of Kai Yih—a memory etched into her skin in the form of a tattoo. On her back, she bore the image of a black crane. As he remembered this tattoo, he also recalled the profound conversation they had about its significance.

Kai Yih had explained that the crane held a deep meaning for her, and she shared how it was a symbol of grace, longevity, and wisdom in many Eastern cultures of The Continent. The crane, with its elegant and majestic presence, was revered as a powerful symbol of life, renewal, and protection. It embodied the qualities of strength, agility, and adaptability, traits that resonated deeply with the mission and values of the school Putnam was envisioning.

Moved by the depth of meaning that the crane held for Kai Yih and its significance in the Eastern cultures of The Continent, Putnam made a heartfelt decision. He chose the crane as the symbol for the school he was building. Little

did he know at the time that this seemingly simple choice would not only pay tribute to Kai Yih and the crane's profound symbolic meaning but also perfectly encapsulate the specialization of the school in aquatic and aerial combat. The crane, with its grace and mastery of both water and sky, became an emblem that would forever represent the School of the Crane and its unique mission to protect the world from the threats that roam the waters and the skies.

The fortress, mainly due to the work of dwarven colonists settled on the island who would be hired for its construction, would take little time to be finished, and by the mid of the year 1380, it would be completely prepared and ready to be inhabited. The next step was to find more people to inhabit it (more specifically, those who would be the first Crane adepts) and not only Putnam and his friends.

This would come in the form of Stefan, later known as Stefan "The Crane," who would ultimately become the first adept and witcher originating from this new school. Additionally, he would be the first of the eleven adopted children that Putnam and Jolanta would have. Putnam would meet Stefan during a visit to the capital of Hawaiki, Elmia, which he made in search of animals needed for the school's farm to make it as self-sustainable as possible, depending as little as possible on imports from the various population centers on the island. Specifically, at the port, when a Nilfgaardian slave ship had made a technical stop on the island before continuing its journey to the Nilfgaardian Overseas Provinces (since, due to new Nilfgaardian laws, they couldn't enslave the natives of their territories in the Western Continent, as they were full-fledged citizens of Nilfgaard as part of the new imperial provinces. But the Nilfgaardian slavers had found a legal loophole that allowed them to import slaves from places like Haakland, or from the slave trade that Nilfgaard had with the Tuyotuki Islands through its colony of Sabana. This was also the case of how Putnam would meet the last of the first Cranes, and adopted daughter too, Bo). They had taken advantage of the technical stop to showcase the slaves and get rid of those who were weaker or too sick to withstand the work awaiting them in the provinces. Despite everything, it's worth mentioning that, unlike Nordlings servants, Nilfgaardian slaves had a series of guaranteed basic rights, but that's a completely different story.

Putnam would pass by the display, and there he would see him: a frail and sickly boy, around six years old, for whom no sensible person would dare to offer a

coin. But something in Putnam's instinct told him that the boy had what it took to be a witcher (and he was not mistaken). Without much hesitation, he bought him, specifically for half a copper coin, a ridiculously low amount, and took him with him.

As time passed, Stefan's initial fear of Putnam gradually gave way to trust and affection. It became evident that Putnam was different from Stefan's former owner, and he proved this through his caring and protective demeanor. Stefan's delicate health became a priority for Putnam, ensuring it didn't deteriorate further and overseeing his overall well-being.

In a remarkably short span, Stefan's feelings towards Putnam transformed into a deep and genuine fondness. He began to regard Putnam not just as a mentor, but as a father figure, addressing him with the term "father." This affectionate gesture profoundly moved Putnam. It stirred something within him, prompting a reevaluation of fatherhood, a role he hadn't seriously considered since Sigurd's passing.

In a heartfelt decision, Putnam took the step to legally adopt Stefan, formalizing their father-son bond. This act set a precedent that would extend to the remaining ten members of what would known as "The First Ones" or the first generation. Though the subsequent generations of Cranes up until the 1500s were not legally adopted, Putnam and Jolanta treated them as their own children, creating a nurturing and familial environment within the School of the Crane. This unspoken yet profound bond forged a legacy of care and mentorship that would shape the school's culture for generations to come.

And you might be wondering, did Putnam recruit more children after adopting Stefan, right? It was a logical step if he wanted to start a school of witchers. It was indeed part of his plans, but due to Stefan's frail health (whom he intended to mutate once the year of training was completed), this plan to acquire more students and truly set the school in motion (as he had only done so de jure) would be delayed. Stefan fell ill again in early 1381, this time with an unknown tropical disease and Putnam, on his part, wanted to make sure he could properly care for a child and successfully mutate him (even if it was a bit of a gamble, and the odds were not in their favor) before dealing with more.

Unbeknownst to him, this humanitarian gesture by Putnam inadvertently paved the way for the appearance of Jolanta later that same year. With her arrival, she became the co-founder of the school after imbuing it with her ideas, finally

setting it in motion for real and not just on paper.

Reencounter and joining of Jolanta to the School of the Crane (1381)

Only a few months later, as already said, on May 11, 1381, which happened to be Putnam's 126th birthday, Jolanta would reappear in both the fortress and the life of the now first Grandmaster of the School of the Crane. Neither of them had any inkling of what this reencounter would bring, but it held the promise of positive changes, not just for them personally but also for the school itself. However, before delving into this, let's provide some context regarding Jolanta's situation.

Her tale is one of heartache and longing, rooted in the belief, as already said, that she had lost Putnam during the Haaki Invasion, an event that falsely pronounced him clinically deceased. A decade later, in 1360, as already mentioned, fate intervened, orchestrating a reunion that would eventually turn passionate between them. Yet, the torrent of emotions unleashed led Jolanta to depart silently the very next day. It was a painful choice, driven by the guilt she bore for having betrayed her partner from that time, a transgression she attributed to Putnam and the intensity of their rekindled connection.

Despite the turmoil, Jolanta persisted in her role as a witcher, unaware that she had unwittingly become the last living member of the School of the Cat. By this time, the remaining members who had resisted Lambert's reforms leading to the emergence of the School of the Lynx had all passed away, leaving only Jolanta as the last of them. While she clung to the hope of reuniting with a fellow member and resurrecting the school, for example, in Stygga once again, the cruel march of time slowly revealed her solitude and the bitter truth that she was the last member of the once School of the Cat, even without explicit confirmation.

The most poignant reminder of her isolation came one day when she received a letter from Lambert, sent from the Western Continent, inviting her to join the Lynxes. This offer weighed heavily on her, reminding her of the years that had passed, the overwhelming loneliness she felt, and the deep longing for her past life in Dyn Marv (so much so that she adopted the caravan's name as her surname, which would eventually be corrupted to Dinmarb due to bureaucratic issues). It may not have been the most comfortable place to live, but it had been her home, and the heart always aches for home, no matter how humble it may be.

And despite her reservations and her lingering talasophobia, which had not

abated, Jolanta reluctantly accepted Lambert's offer. She sold her reconstructed house in Novigrad and, with a heavy heart, embarked on a ship headed for the Western Continent to join the Lynxes. Little did she know that life had other plans in store for her, as it would once again reunite her with Putnam, and this time, their reunion would be everlasting.

The steps towards the reunion between the two former lovers and future husband and wife would happen gradually. First, with Jolanta's journey across the Great Sea towards the New World. Second, during the journey, despite her aforementioned thalassophobia, Jolanta had to act as a witcher against sea monsters, thus foreshadowing her destiny as a co-founder of the School of the Crane. Third, through rumors that indirectly mentioned Putnam and talked about his new school. And fourth and last, through verifying these rumors herself, once the ship made its usual technical stop in Hawaiki, and she decided to stay, thinking to satisfy her curiosity and then continue her journey to the Western Continent, unaware that, after that harmless act to satisfy her curiosity, the island would become her new home for many years. She arrived at the still unnamed fortress to inquire about these new witchers, as already mentioned, on Putnam's 126th birthday, more precisely at nightfall. And due to the situation they were going through in the fortress with Stefan and his illness, as if it were a light in the darkness.

In fact, Putnam was the one who received her, as when she arrived it was late at night, and he was the only one still awake, having spent entire nights taking care of Stefan. Putnam looked very tired. The reception was not uncomfortable but rather tense, after so many years. Putting it in poetic terms, "*the sea had brought her to his shore*," and initially, Putnam didn't quite know how to react, as things like the conversation they never had 21 years ago when she left the next day weighed between them. Still, he treated her with the courtesy one extends to a guest, explained everything about the fortress that very night, assigned her a room (a room which, as a curiosity, in the future would be the room of one of his adopted sons, Ezeld), and the next day, about the concept of the school, in addition to introducing her to the people who were part of it at that time. Little did they both know that what would initially seem like staying for a few days would end up becoming being together again, shaping and leading the school together for 119 years, getting married, and overcoming the so-called "*bone weddings*".

With their return to being together, thanks, curiously, to Stefan and his illness,

they demonstrated to each other, without uttering a word, just how much they loved each other by staying together again in the bad, as on many other occasions, such as in 1281 or 1360. Jolanta, noticing Putnam's tiredness (and according to her, although she didn't believe it herself, as a favor for letting him stay in the fortress for a few days), would join the former Golden Griffin in his sleepless nights, taking care of the one who went from being the "nestling" of the (ex) Griffin to being both of theirs. Surprisingly, Putnam, as stubborn and "*I don't need anyone's help*" as he was, accepted. Who knows if it was because he missed her company, felt the weight of age (at least mentally), was very tired, or simply because he had changed; the fact is that he accepted. Not without always watching over her well-being and ensuring she didn't overexert herself, which, little by little, began to rekindle the embers of that lost love, turning them back into a bonfire that would burn strongly when the key moment finally arrived after several days. This moment being nothing more and nothing less than Jolanta's risky (and without consulting Putnam, as well as lying to the rest of the staff) decision to make Stefan go through the Trial of the Grasses when she noticed that the disease was about to take him to his death. This would ultimately save the boy, but not without leaving him with green feline eyes due to the illness, similar to Coen from the School of the Griffin in his day after suffering from smallpox.

This pivotal moment, in fact, occurred more specifically when Putnam left the fortress to consult with the local doctors, hoping to gain insights into the various endemic diseases of the islands and some method to help Stefan. In his absence, Jolanta took advantage to perform that risky act, as Putnam would be absent for six days (three going, and three returning), with only one day's difference from when the changes produced by the Trial of the Grasses would generally take place (that is, one week).

And you can imagine the rest. When Putnam returned to the fortress (unfortunately without any progress) and learned of what Jolanta had done without his permission, his face flushed with contained anger. He sought out the still Cat witcheress, and without a word, silently praying to Freyja for Stefan to survive the day he had still left, he stared at Jolanta with a look that could have melted steel. But she, despite it all, stood her ground (though deep down, she had a strange mix of fear, astonishment, and excitement), aware that she had crossed a dangerous line. What followed was the biggest scolding Jolanta had ever received in her life. Putnam was so furious that, in Roth's exact words, who went to see what was happening, "*it seemed like he had been possessed by a*

demon and had turned into a madman." Few kind words came out of his mouth, and he shouted so much that he even became hoarse. "*How dare she,*" "*she was just a guest,*" "*if Stefan were to die, she would never see his face again in her life, and he would banned her forever from entering the fortress*" were among the many things Putnam said to her. These were the milder ones; there's no need to delve into the rest.

It wouldn't be until Stefan stopped waking up and screaming, with

Putnam confirming he was still alive and had likely survived that part of the Trial of the Grasses, that the witcher's anger slowly gave way to the unresolved tension between him and Jolanta. This tension transformed into a gaze filled with pent-up emotions. They found themselves at a point of no return, where passion and fury intertwined in a dangerous dance. The tension between them reached its peak on the same night. In the reflection of the flames illuminating the dining room, during a seemingly troubled and silent dinner that appeared to end badly with another outburst from Putnam, their gazes sparked with pent-up emotions, and their breaths synchronized slowly.

It was a casual brush, barely noticeable, when they both reached for the salt to season their food, and it broke the ice. Their hands met by accident as they both reached for the salt shaker. A shiver ran down their spines, and in that moment, the anger and frustration on Putnam's part, and to some extent, the guilt that Jolanta ultimately felt for not having informed Putnam of her intentions with Stefan, gave way to something more intense.

Without uttering a word, Putnam rose from his seat and gently pulled Jolanta closer to him, and their lips met in a passionate yet silent kiss. It was a kiss that spoke of years of complicity, repressed love, and a connection they had never been able to deny completely.

Time seemed to stand still as they lost themselves in that kiss, in the warmth of their bodies drawing closer. It was a moment of catharsis, where they released the built-up tension. They realized that, despite everything, they still felt something for each other, something that had survived time and distance.

Finally, they parted, their gazes now filled with a new complicity. Without the need for words, they had found a way to heal the wounds of the past, from Putnam's 1281 abandonment, through the painful breakup in Vinland, ending with Jolanta's aforementioned abandonment of Putnam in 1360, and moved

forward together into an uncertain future. The passion they had shared in that instant reminded them that, although the road would be complicated, they were willing to face it together, united by something stronger than pride or anger: the love they had never stopped feeling for each other.

With that being said, shortly after Stefan successfully completed the Trial of the Grasses, Jolanta made the heartfelt choice to remain by Putnam's side, opting not to join Lambert and the other Lynxes. Her decision was more than well-received by Putnam and the others, including Stefan. In a meaningful gesture, Putnam presented her with a Crane medallion and also bestowed upon her the grandmaster's mantle that she would share with him, signifying their shared commitment as equals on this journey and true partners in every sense. And with this, the School of the Crane was de facto born.

The First Ones (1381 - 1383 / 1383 - 1400)

After Jolanta joined the school and became a grandmaster, they began to discuss, refine, implement, change, and polish ideas that she and Putnam had. On some occasions, both of them would yield to the other's idea, but often, they would reach a middle ground or even come up with a new and better idea after extensive debate. Furthermore, their wedding took place in the summer of that same year. It was an intimate ceremony, held on the beach just ten minutes away from the fortress, following a civil rite. Charz, Jabolet, and Stefan acted as witnesses, with Roth officiating the ceremony.

As a curiosity, once the syncretic culture of Fabiola and the Silk Islands further developed, Putnam and Jolanta eventually adopted the double surname that became common among humans in this part of the world. They became Putnam Pitch Dinmarb and Jolanta Dinmarb Pitch respectively (something that, consequently, their adopted children would also inherit).

Only after the wedding would they begin the search for more first students, who, like Stefan, as mentioned before, would also become their adopted children. The next after Stefan would be Math, a two-year-old Nordling, along with a batch of more children after visiting the Elmia Orphanage. Most of these children had lost their parents due to monsters, either on their way to the islands, arriving as shipwrecks, or on the islands themselves. So, it made sense to start there.

In due course, Putnam and Jolanta brokered an accord with the colonial government. It stipulated that children who remained unadopted after a certain period would find refuge within the fortress. This landmark agreement would

serve as the precursor to a series of subsequent pacts, encompassing various domains. These included safeguards to shield the Cranes from things like the pogroms suffered by other schools in the past, granting them a degree of legal protection and, if necessary, assistance in defense against potential aggressors (a guarantee never absolute, yet an achievement in its own right).

Following Stefan and Math, Orser and Ucalt would be welcomed. Aged 5 and 3 respectively, Orser hailed from Nordling heritage, while Ucalt was of Silk Islander origin. Their rescue by Putnam and Jolanta unfolded during a voyage through the islands in search of potential students. They had been kidnapped by a pirate ship that had plundered their village along with other children, intending to "gift" them to certain nobles with a disturbing interest in children, in exchange for a large sum of money.

After Orser and Ucalt, at some point in 1382, Ezeld, a one-year-old of Nordling origin, would join the family next. Putnam and Jolanta saved him from being eaten by an orange dragon that had taken his parents, all while they were on their way to investigate rumored ghostly appearances at the mysterious Moai statues of Hawaiki on orders from the vice-governor. This was in exchange for future Crane adepts from local orphans, this time not only from the Elmia Orphanage as they had previously agreed, but also from the private orphanage in the port city of Putnam.

After Stefan, Math, Orser, Ucalt, and Ezeld, the following members would join the family between the remaining of 1382 and 1383:

Acol, 2 years old, of mixed origins, the child of a noble Nordling from New Verden and a native of The Plains, given to Putnam and Jolanta as a reward (instead of the money he promised them) for having freed him from the specter of his wife, which would later be classified as a chocani. Deeran, of Nordling origin and two years old, was saved by Putnam and Jolanta while they were on a contract to deal with an abere and Enu, also of Nordling origin and two years old, was saved by Jolanta from his abusive family, similar to how Pardus of Korath did with hers, meaning, by killing them in the process.

And after this three, Uzoma, of three years old, was the son of a Nordling settler who had become a fisherman and was killed by an adaro. Putnam was, in fact, "hired" by the then-child to find his father, discovering his body, dispatching the monster, and then taking the child with him since he had no other family and couldn't leave him alone. Idowu, of mixed origins, was the son of two merchants:

a father who was half [Zangvebarian](#) and half [Ofieri](#), and a mother who was half Melukkan and half Nilgaardian. They were en route to the Zangvebarian Colonies, as Putnam was able to ascertain through his investigation when he found him. Idowu was just six months old at the time, the sole survivor of a shipwreck after their vessel was attacked by a lusca, and finally, Halsey, better known as Bo, was the only girl of that generation (although more would be trained and mutated later, all thanks to advances like those of [Nasira](#)). She was the youngest of all the siblings, of unknown origin but likely Tuyotukian, and was just 1 month old. When Putnam found her during his and Jolanta's passage through the Nilgaardian Overseas Provinces, she was the sole survivor of a massacre carried out by a group of bandits on a slave plantation. Initially, Putnam had considered returning her to the owner of the slave plantation, but the then-baby grew so attached to him that he ultimately decided to keep her.

Along with the children who came with Math, they would amount to a total of about 40. Out of these, only around 10 would survive the Trial of the Grasses. These survivors would also endure the rest of the trials and, as mentioned before, graduate to become the First Ones or the first generation of Cranes.

As time passed, as also previously mentioned, they would become the adopted children of Putnam and Jolanta. The couple grew just as fond of them as they had with Stefan back in the day, eventually legally adopting them. This meant they were raised and trained not only as comrades but practically as biological siblings, even though they were not.

In fact, one could say that the fortress at that time transformed into the home of a large family, with individuals like Roth, who became akin to an uncle figure for the first Cranes. This pattern would repeat in the subsequent generations of Cranes, though perhaps not quite as intensely.

Reunion with Adalwulf and signing of the Witcher Reformation Act (1390)

“One of the problems that we have, that brought about the downfall of both the order and many schools, Adalwulf, was that we had no guide to conduct for all, no set of moral principles to share despite our differences. The Bears? Pragmatic but lacking empathy, solely focused on efficiency. The Cats? Let’s not talk about them; we already know their history. The Wolves? Good people, yes, balanced both as professionals and as individuals, but also lacking a code of conduct. With it, incidents like Berengar’s betrayal could have been avoided and the school may have survived. If we want to ensure the future of our guild, in my opinion, I think we

should start with that.”

—Putnam to Adalwulf during the latter's visit to Kaer Darh.

After 10 years of training the first Cranes, mostly peaceful with only occasional minor scares, mainly from Ezeld, the year 1390 arrived with a significant event, not only for the Cranes but for the entire witcher guild in general. This event was none other than the visits of Adalwulf of Aedirn, a long-time friend of Putnam, to the different witcher schools on both sides of the world, in order for them to sign the document known as the [Witcher's Reformation Act](#). This document aimed not to restore the old Order but at least to bring more unity to the guild and thus prevent mistakes like those of the extinct Order of Witchers, and the various schools that succeeded the order, which nearly led to their disappearance in the past.

Additionally, it sought to prevent events such as the Cats' betrayal of the Wolves or what the Foxes themselves suffered at the hands of the [School of the Rat](#). Adalwulf began with the schools present on the Old Continent, namely Griffin, Viper, Manticore, and [Gyrfalcon](#). By that same year, he already had his sights set on having those on the Western Continent also sign the act. He started first with the Cranes on the Silk Islands, and concluded with the Lynxes on the Western Continent. Later, he added the School of the Bat once it was founded. However, he couldn't include the School of the Dragon or the School of the Basan in the treaty due to their remote locations in the [Far East](#) of the Old Continent.

It's worth mentioning that Adalwulf and Putnam, after Putnam moved and started the School of the Crane, didn't lose contact, but it simply became more sporadic over time. Initially, it was through letters (which took three months to arrive), and later through letters and also through a megascope once amplifiers were installed in the fortress to establish a connection with the Old Continent. However, this too was somewhat sporadic for a simple reason: it depended heavily on the weather. When clouds from the Mad Sea extended beyond that region of the ocean, the connection became too unstable for proper communication.

As an interesting fact, it seemed that the two friends were quite in sync. Despite the distance, and even though Adalwulf had already planned the visit, it was Putnam who came first and encouraged him to come to [Kaer Darh](#) in one of the many letters that they usually wrote to each other. They had briefly discussed the act during their megascope meetings, and after much consideration, Putnam felt that it wasn't a bad idea for the Cranes to join. However, he wanted to

discuss it in person and perhaps propose some reforms.

It was thanks to Adalwulf's act, among other factors, such as his admiration for figures like Geralt of Rivia and Raven, to name two examples, that Putnam would be inspired to create what would be known as the Codex of the White-Haired, with the help of Jolanta, of course, who provided a necessary touch of pragmatism and realism to counterbalance Putnam's idealism reflected in the initial version. This codex would ultimately serve as a moral guide for the witchers in the Silk Islands and the Western Continent at first (once Putnam managed to get in touch with Lambert and convinced him, albeit reluctantly), aiming to prevent things like the corruption of the Cats in the past. It would later expand and also be used by the witchers of the Old Continent after being implemented in Adalwulf's act following his visit to the fortress along with his sisters and two more Fox companions.

Adalwulf received the letter warmly, agreeing to meet his friend in person. Together with Ukok, Natka, and the mages [Eishe of Vicovaro](#) and [Arrah of Verden](#), they embarked on a journey aboard a ship of The Company to the Silk Islands. Their visit lasted approximately two months, during which the two friends reconnected on a personal level. They engaged in lengthy, almost philosophical discussions about the document, interspersed with various activities such as observing the students' training and fishing. Following Adalwulf's stay at Kaer Darh, Putnam's codex was integrated into the act. Originally designed for his own school and later adopted by the Lynxes after Jolanta suggested to Putnam that he should try to convince Lambert to adopt it, it found a place among the broader witcher community, thanks to Fox. This act marked a significant step towards unity and moral clarity within the guild.

However, it's important to note that the Griffins stood as an exception. Despite their endorsement of Adalwulf's act, they retained their own distinct code. They found the Codex's perceived "excessive pragmatism" to be at odds with their own values and traditions, leading them to preserve their unique way of operating within the guild.

Training the next five generations of Crane School witches (1400 - 1500)

Shortly after Adalwulf's visit in 1390, more precisely one month later, the first graduation of the school would take place, which would be Stefan's, nicknamed Stefan "The Crane" by his brothers, because he was the first student of the school. He would emerge at the age of 18 into the world as the first witcher from

the School of the Crane. On the other hand, his brothers wouldn't finish their training (due to the age difference with Stefan) until the year 1400. It's in this year that the first generation of Crane witches, as such, would emerge into the world (excluding Stefan, as he was an exceptional case due to his circumstances), joining their older brother in the task of protecting the skies and seas of the world.

After that,
Putnam and

Jolanta continued to train five more generations of Cranes, eventually with the help of their adopted children as teachers in various fields, as well as previous generations of Cranes who grew up, graduated, and gained experience. They retired from being grandmasters and teaching in 1500, moving to live a relatively peaceful life on the outskirts of the capital of [Fabiola](#), Cherdian, in a house given to Putnam by the vice-governor as a gift during one of the anniversaries of the foundation of Fabiola, since he was the only member still alive from the expedition that discovered the islands and the Western Continent. Putnam focused mainly on painting, with Jolanta as his muse, occasionally taking on contracts to stay sharp, so to speak. Jolanta did the same regarding contracts, but also enjoyed the pleasures of life with her husband. They passed the mantle of grandmaster to Ucalt, who would remain in the position until 1555.

Unfortunately, Roth would not accompany them, as Putnam would retire the dwarf from his work, passing on the mantle of the School of the Crane's blacksmith to his apprentices, and that of the cook to a new worker around 1450, as he believed that, with all he had done, he had already repaid his life debt to him. Thus granting him a more than well-deserved retirement. Roth would pass away shortly after in 1455, at the age of 200. The entire School of the Crane would attend his funeral and mourn his loss.

During this time, many things happened. One of the most notable, as well as tragic due to the large number of victims it claimed, occurred in the year 1410. It was the attack on the main population centers of Fabiola and the Silk Islands by the Higher Vampire tribe known as Ammurun, along with a wide variety of vampires from both classifications. They felt they were losing control over what they considered their "territories" and sought to intimidate and subjugate humans to their will. Some of these vampires were even unknown to humanity until that date. However, in the end, humans managed to repel them. Due to this

event reaching the islands, it led the School of the Crane to get involved. One of its members, Math, lost an arm during this time and had to use a prosthetic. This experience later motivated him to establish the [School of the Bat](#) in an attempt to find a way to deal with them and prevent something like this from happening again.

As an interesting side note, Putnam also came close to death during this event when he attempted to face what would later be known as a talamaur on his own. However, with the combined efforts of Math, Ezeld, and Jolanta, they managed to save his life at the last moment.

Others worth mentioning, both for their joyousness and their equal interest, included Bo's pairing and subsequent marriage to a diplomat from the Tuyotuki Islands. This would later lead her to establish another school branching off from the Cranes, the School of the Basan, on the other side of the world. However, this school was not solely focused on the Tuyotuki, unlike a certain offshoot School of the Manticore.

There was also the confrontation of Putnam and Jolanta against one of [Dagon's sons](#), the dilemma both Crane parents had to deal with regarding the erumía, the usual pirate attacks to the islands from time to time, the problem with the selamodir, which involved the participation of many members of the school (though not all), and the deception of the tabibal.

Retirement and Jolanta's death (1500 - 1555)

"It's good to see you enjoying your retirement, father. You deserve it after all the years of service"

—Stefan "The Crane" after paying a visit to Putnam at his home on the outskirts of Cherdian

After retiring and moving to Cherdian, as previously mentioned, Putnam and Jolanta enjoyed a well-deserved retirement where they hardly had to worry about anything other than enjoying themselves and civilian life, so to speak. Putnam had saved a portion of the money he had used for the construction of the fortress for an 'emergency,' which turned out to be his retirement, as fortunately nothing more serious had happened. This money served them for a long while until Putnam resumed his hobby of drawing and painting under better conditions. Before long, he made a name for himself in Fabiola's art scene (although always avoiding parties and other extravagances of the art world)

under the alias Joaquim Sorala. He stood out for his luminist work, especially his portraits (most of which were of Jolanta), and those paintings that depicted the coastal life of Fabiola, but particularly that of Cherdian.

Putnam and Jolanta's life as retirees was tranquil and enjoyable in more than one sense, something that the majority of their peers could only have dreamed of. It seemed as if life, after so many tribulations, had gradually granted them moments of respite, reducing its intensity until finally reaching that state, allowing them to age together in peace. Although, in reality, aging, or at least in appearance, wasn't something they did much of. They retained the look they had back in the 1490s, Jolanta due to the formula used by the School of the Cat to mutate women, which was highly experimental, and due to certain biological differences, to put it scientifically, between female and male *Homo Venator* (considering the subspecies they both were). Putnam, on the other hand, retained his appearance thanks to what's known as Manisa's Genesis. Both of them ended up with an appearance in their late thirties or early forties, more or less.

As time continued to march forward, the year 1510 marked a profound and somber moment in Putnam's life as Jolanta passed away peacefully in her own bed. The circumstances surrounding her passing remained shrouded in mystery. Was it a sudden departure or possibly a consequence of the experimental formula used by the School of the Cat? These questions would forever remain unanswered. One fateful evening, they went to sleep together as they had done for 120 years, but Jolanta did not awaken.

In the wake of Jolanta's death, Putnam took it upon himself to tenderly prepare her body for its final journey. He embarked on a solemn journey to Kaer Darh, where he delivered the heartbreak news of Jolanta's passing to the School of the Crane, and together with the children they had lovingly embraced as their own, they orchestrated a fitting funeral to honor her memory. Jolanta, in her passing, became the first known female witcher to peacefully pass away in her own bed, mirroring the distinction held by the Griffin male witcher, Ryvlyn of Sanzode.

Putnam, though profoundly affected by the loss of his beloved Jolanta, understood that 120 years of marriage and companionship couldn't be easily forgotten. He carried her memory with him every day and knew that he would miss her deeply until his own time came. Yet, Putnam chose a path of acceptance and resilience, a lesson he had learned through the pains of loss before. He

recognized that holding onto the past like a burning ember could consume one's soul. In this challenging moment, he drew strength from the wisdom of letting go and moving forward.

Moreover, he was well aware that Jolanta, in her fiercely independent spirit, would have scorned the notion of him dwelling endlessly in sorrow. Instead, he honored her memory by carrying on with the courage and determination that had defined their long and remarkable journey together. In the face of this profound loss, Putnam found solace in the knowledge that he had done right by Jolanta, allowing her to rest peacefully while he continued to embrace life's uncertainties with the same unwavering spirit that had characterized their enduring love.

As the years flowed on, the weight of solitude settled upon Putnam's shoulders. Returning to his home in Cherdian after the funeral, he would spend the next 45 years enveloped in a quiet world of his own making. With brushes in hand, he poured his heart into his paintings, each stroke a reflection of the emotions that dwelled within him. The occasional monster contract served as a tether to the life he once led, a reminder of the world beyond his canvas.

Yet, in the sacred space he called home, the echo of memories with Jolanta lingered. He moved through the rooms, retracing steps once taken together, cherishing the ghostly traces of her presence. The laughter, the shared dreams, the quiet moments of understanding—all now existed in the hallowed halls of memory.

His solitude was interrupted, however, by the steady stream of visits from his children. Both those he had legally adopted and the members of the School of the Crane from other generations, they came with concern etched upon their faces. They sought to bridge the gap of his isolation, offering their company and care, ensuring he was not alone in his grief.

In a turn of purpose, Putnam took on a new role as an author, weaving Jolanta's diaries into a narrative to further share her extraordinary story with the world. He chose to remain behind the scenes, allowing another writer to stand in the spotlight. He had no desire to field questions about the book or about Jolanta herself. The tale was hers to tell, and he was content to be the silent hand that brought it to light.

Through the passage of time, Putnam found a way to carry the weight of loss. He navigated the ebb and flow of grief, understanding that some days would be

brighter, while others dipped into shadow. Age took its toll, weariness settling into his bones, and there were moments when the facade of strength became too heavy to bear in front of others.

Yet, in those private moments, he sought solace in the knowledge that he had honored Jolanta's memory. Her spirit lived on in the strokes of his paintings, in the pages of her diaries turned book, and in the hearts of those who had come to know her through his words. In the sanctuary of his home, he held onto the love they had shared, finding comfort in the enduring legacy of their extraordinary journey together.

Despite Ezeld's persistent attempts to play matchmaker, particularly with sorceresses, Putnam staunchly declined every proposition. In the witcher's own words, "*I'd rather be alone than with some wench who doesn't even come close to measuring up to your mother*" Putnam's unwavering devotion to Jolanta and the profound impact she had on his life were insurmountable barriers to any potential romantic entanglements. He held her memory in such high regard that he couldn't fathom replacing her with anyone else. The love they shared was a flame that continued to burn brightly in his heart, casting a long shadow over any attempts to kindle a new connection.

Unbeknownst to Putnam, his book would go on to wield significant influence among the priests of Fabiola's Creole religion, known as Santism—a blend that occurred over time due to the interaction of Fabiola with the Zangvebarian colonies, incorporating elements of Melitele/Freyja, Toussaint Saints, and Zangvebarian Shamanism. Shortly after Jolanta's passing, and following the release of Putnam's book, owing to her notable deeds spanning both the distant past and recent history, the priests of Santism canonized her as Saint Jolanta, bearing the title "Defender of the Innocent and Purifier of Corruption."

Jolanta's heroic role in dismantling a vile pedophilia network associated with the Church of the Eternal Fire in 1288 became a widely embraced and resonant narrative. Her actions struck a chord with the faithful of Santism, serving as a symbol of moral fortitude and unwavering dedication to justice. As a result, her veneration and adoration began to take root, with the cult of Saint Jolanta steadily gaining followers and recognition. This process of canonization and reverence commenced around the year 1515, solidifying her place as a revered figure within the Santism faith.

Death (May 11, 1555)

"Your path is at its end. What a way to go though, against Dagon! Got to say even at the moment of death you still impress me, my friend. Your path has ended, brother. May what waits you beyond the Veil, bring you peace and happiness"

—Adalwulf whispers over Putnam's body at the wake

For Putnam, death would come on May 11, 1555, his 300th birthday. It was a day like any other for him, as he hadn't celebrated his birthdays since Jolanta's death, despite his children's insistence. He received his embrace in a way common for a witcher, facing a monster, but more than fitting for someone like him, for it was no ordinary monster, but none other than [Dagon](#) himself. After being defeated by Geralt of Rivia in 1270, Dagon had been taken back to the ocean to be reanimated (since no mortal can kill Dagon). Once reanimated, he planned his next moves from there (more precisely, from the submerged city of Ys) alongside his [vodyanoi](#) servants.

These movements were reflected in occasional attacks on the coasts of both continents, which always, on the surface, seemed to fail (and when Putnam's death occurred, it would be no exception). Dagon, patient as he was, had planned to gradually weaken the inhabitants of the land with these attacks until they had exhausted their resources. He would also wage a war against the merpeople and their [sea witches](#), as they were too formidable a threat to be overlooked if he wanted his plans to turn that sphere into his new domain to succeed. He would then launch a larger-scale attack to seize control of everything.

Putnam and Dagon had never faced each other before, but let's say they had

"heard" of each other. Putnam, because Dagon was a name he recognized; more specifically, Dagon was the being that his twin brother Mimit had once sought to dominate like a Djinn, and for whom he had been "preparing" Putnam as a vessel to contain and channel his power and later because what Mimit did what he did with the intention of awakening Dagon to dominate him in 1360. Dagon, on the other hand, knew of Putnam because Putnam had repelled several attacks by his vodyanoi servants during his time as the grandmaster of the School of the Crane. The most significant of these encounters led to the death of one Dagon's sons, the Ancient Ocean Deep One, with whom Putnam and Jolanta ultimately prevailed. So, let's say Dagon was acquainted with and harbored a

certain hatred for the witcher, as he had not only ended his son but also his right-hand man and some of his best generals. He intended to seek vengeance for this, perhaps not on the day that the Ancient Ocean Deep One died, but sometime later.

Although if we also consider the stories surrounding Putnam in the Old Continent, Putnam would also, during his proto-Crane era, kill another of Dagon's offspring, prior to the one he killed with Jolanta, although without realizing that it was one—the Ancient River Deep One. However, like many tales surrounding the former Golden Griffin, this remained unverifiable.

And the day arrived, on that fateful May 11th, 1555, when Dagon, along with his vodyanoi, decided it was time to give the witcher his well-deserved punishment and launch an attack on Cherdian. The aim was not only to reduce the city to ashes as part of his long - term plans of domination, but also to end the witcher's life. This turned what was a normal day for Putnam, like any other (in fact, he had planned to go celebrate his birthday with Ezeld at a new tavern that had recently opened, after yielding to his son's insistence, who was visiting during those days), into the day of his departure from the world, and the day that would ultimately solidify his legend and sanctification.

The salty wind blew strongly along the coast of Cherdian as the sky darkened, foreshadowing the arrival of both a physical and metaphorical storm. Putnam, unsuspecting of the fate that awaited him, was getting ready for what he believed would be a peaceful evening at the tavern Ezeld had mentioned to him.

But in the depths of the ocean, Dagon and his vodyanoi were preparing for the attack. The waters churned with immense fury, heralding the arrival of the fearsome being. His eyes burned with the promise of vengeance as he devised his strategy to end Putnam's life for having thwarted his plans by eliminating one of his finest generals.

Meanwhile, in Cherdian, people came and went, oblivious to the imminent danger looming over them. The waves crashed against the city walls, like foreboding whispers of a fate about to be unleashed.

In the tavern, Putnam shared some laughs that Ezeld managed to draw from him, along with toasts. Despite his initial reluctance, he succeeded in brightening what seemed like just another birthday where Jolanta wasn't by his side. Both father and son were unaware of the dark shadow looming over the city. The warmth of the atmosphere contrasted with Dagon's icy determination, as his

inexorable advance drew nearer to the coast.

Night fell, and with it, darkness brought the arrival of the storm. The first raindrops pelted the cobbled streets of Cherdian. At that moment, the stormy sky was illuminated with a supernatural light, heralding the arrival of Dagon and his aquatic army.

While Putnam and Ezeld shared moments of joy in the tavern, oblivious to the imminent threat approaching, alarms began to blare in the city. Screams of terror filled the air as people caught sight of the first waves of vodynai emerging from the sea, followed by the colossal figure of Dagon, whose eyes gleamed with malevolent determination.

The city of Cherdian turned into a chaotic battleground, with the crash of waves against the walls and Dagon's roars echoing through the air as the vodynai carried out a massacre in their lord's name against humans. Once Putnam had his equipment with him, upon returning, he unsheathed his silver sword and lunged into the tide of vodynai, facing them with astonishing skill and dexterity, trying to save as many lives as possible while attempting to reach Dagon.

Meanwhile, Ezeld fought bravely at his side.

At the epicenter of the storm, Putnam and Dagon finally faced each other. The witcher, with determination in his eyes, confronted the colossus with unwavering courage, knowing that this duel would decide the fate of the city and, possibly, his own. The ensuing duel was fierce and brutal, with each strike and slash echoing through the night. Putnam moved with lethal grace, his experience as a witcher being his greatest ally against the aquatic monsters. However, Dagon was an unstoppable force, and his fury was unleashed entirely upon the man who had ended his offspring.

Time seemed to stand still as the duel between Putnam and Dagon raged on, each moment marked by the spark of silver against scales and the tide of water and blood entwined in a violent dance that inundated the city. The inhabitants of Cherdian, some armed with whatever they could find, eventually joined the battle against Dagon's army, helping Ezeld who was a little overwhelmed, displaying surprising bravery in the face of the looming threat to their home.

The battle against Dagon's army reached its climax when Putnam and Dagon faced each other in the already mentioned fierce duel. The witcher deployed all his experience and skill, but the power of the ancient being was overwhelming. Each blow from Dagon was like a cataclysm, shaking the earth and rocking the

foundations of the city.

Putnam's sword clashed against Dagon's scaly skin, sending bright sparks in all directions. Each strike was a testament to the skill and determination of both fighters, while the storm roared around them, as if nature itself was watching with bated breath. But despite his bravery, Putnam began to show signs of fatigue. His wounds were bleeding, and his strength waned with each blow he received. Ezeld, helplessly observing his father's struggle, sought a way to assist, but he found himself surrounded by more vodynai, forcing him to face them.

Finally, a devastating blow from Dagon caused Putnam to fall to his knees, his silver sword slipping from his hand. The witcher fought to stand, but his strength was failing him. Dagon, with a guttural sound that vaguely resembled a malevolent laugh, towered over him, prepared to deliver the final blow.

It was then, as the subsequent legend tells, that nature itself intervened. A beam of bright light tore through the stormy sky, and thunder rumbled with an unprecedented force. The storm, which seemed to be on Dagon's side, suddenly changed course. The wind and rain enveloped the ancient being, mysteriously causing it to retreat.

Ezeld, astonished by this turn of events, watched as his father staggered, still with determination in his eyes. Putnam, with one last effort, picked up his silver sword and delivered a final blow to Dagon, who roared in agony before falling to the ground weakened.

The army of vodynai, upon seeing their leader defeated, began to retreat, submerging once again into the depths of the sea and taking a weakened Dagon with them. The storm dissipated, leaving behind a city in ruins and an exhausted Putnam in its wake.

Ezeld, filled with desperation and grief, immediately rushed to his father's side, but it was too late. Putnam, gravely wounded, managed to muster a weak smile for his son, dedicating one final thought to both Ezeld and Jolanta before closing his eyes forever. Tears welled up in Ezeld's eyes as he realized the extent of his father's sacrifice. Putnam had given his life to save the city and its people, demonstrating a selfless courage that extended beyond the call of duty or profession.

Despite the haunting echo of Putnam's words, "no witcher dies in his bed," resonating in Ezeld's mind and causing him additional pain, he summoned every ounce of his courage. With tears held back, he cradled his father's lifeless form, a

man who had not only saved him but had also given him a future. With utmost reverence and respect, Ezeld carried Putnam's body back to Kaer Darh, determined to ensure that the man received a dignified and honorable farewell.

His death, like Jolanta's, had a significant impact on the school, with a special emphasis on his adopted children. Especially Ezeld, who, after losing both his parents, underwent a considerable change in attitude, and Ucalt, who would end up resigning from the position of grandmaster after Putnam's death because he couldn't handle the responsibilities of the position given how he felt. Without Putnam and Jolanta, he felt very lost, as he would occasionally seek their advice. Stefan then took up the mantle, but he would only last a year in the position for similar reasons. This led, in the end, to Ezeld taking the position by 1556. The difference with Jolanta's death lay in one key point, and that is, while Putnam was alive, he could bring order, despite the pain of losing their adoptive mother. After he died, the chaos that arose from grief erupted, and sooner rather than later, intense discussions began among the siblings about what to do now that dad was gone, as well as where to hold the funeral, whether in Kaer Darh or Kaer Seren, because Putnam, despite no longer being a Griffin, still had a lot of affection for his old school.

It wasn't until Adalwulf received the news of Putnam's death (as he was on the Western Continent, investigating the appearance of Dagon) after passing through Cherdian (since that was, obviously, the talk of the city for a long time), that he, upon going to Kaer Darh, would ultimately bring some order, providing guidance to the disoriented Cranes on what to do.

In the end, a middle ground was reached, with neither side prevailing. Putnam's body received the Crane funeral rite, becoming the second to do so after Jolanta, and his heart was removed, split in half, and cremated. Half of the ashes were scattered in the cemetery of Kaer Seren, next to Keldar's grave, and the other half on the beach by his house in Cherdian, where Jolanta and he had spent so much time in their final years together. Adalwulf and Ezeld respectively took on this task.

As for what happened afterward and with their belongings, it was relatively straightforward.

Ezeld inherited the house in Cherdian, using it as a place of rest whenever he passed through the city. Putnam's extensive body of artwork, roughly 3000 paintings, was taken over by Idowu, who distributed his artistic work in various

ways. Some pieces were kept for the fortress, like the self-portrait Putnam had painted of himself and Jolanta, which would always hang on its walls, meticulously maintained. Another portion was sold for substantial sums of money, which greatly benefited the legacy that Putnam and Jolanta had built together, namely the school.

Stefan, on his part, entrusted Putnam's diaries to Adalwulf, believing that he would care for and preserve them with the utmost diligence. True to his trust, Adalwulf embarked on the task of transforming these diaries into a comprehensive book that would recount the life and experiences of Putnam.

As time passed, Adalwulf's book gained immense popularity and acclaim. The combination of Putnam's final heroic act, his lasting legacy, the canonization of Jolanta as a saint in 1515, and the release of this book proved to be a powerful catalyst for Putnam's own canonization. In the year following the book's publication, Putnam was officially canonized as Saint Putnam, with the title "Protector against the darkness."

The cult of Saint Putnam swiftly spread among the followers of Santism, finding resonance and deep devotion within their hearts. In a poignant and almost poetic gesture, symbolizing the profound love once shared by the Crane parents, with the pass of time, the cult of Saint Putnam syncretized with that of Jolanta, merging into a single, unified devotion.

In this way, the story of both Crane parents ended, and the legacy of Putnam and Jolanta endured, leaving an indelible mark not only on the followers of Santism but on all people. It inspired them to confront darkness and adversity with unwavering faith and resilience. Their combined story became a symbol of hope and a testament to the enduring power of love and sacrifice.

Personality

"As legendary as Erland of Larvik himself, if not more."

—Stefan "The Crane"

Putnam was a witcher known for his unwavering sense of justice and duty. He held himself to a strict code of ethics, first following the Griffin's Witcher Code and later following the one he developed known as Codex of the White-Haired with the help of his wife and co-leader of the School of the Crane, Jolanta of Brunswick, Putnam crafted the codex, drawing inspiration from their experiences

and the legacies of historical figures such as Geralt of Rivia and Raven. While Putnam's moral foundation was solid, Jolanta brought a dose of realism that compensated for his overly scripted and idealistic upbringing at Kaer Seren.

Despite their individual approaches, Putnam and Jolanta's collaboration resulted in a code that served as an example and moral compass for other witchers from the 14th century onwards. Putnam's commitment to justice and duty was unwavering, while Jolanta's practicality ensured that their code was grounded in reality.

While reserved and polite with strangers, Putnam was affectionate, loyal, and deeply devoted to those closest to him. He had a childlike innocence and naivety at times, but he was also dangerous when his anger was unleashed. He was an idealistic man with solid principles, and his strong sense of right and wrong made him a moral hero in the eyes of many.

Putnam was a perfectionist who was highly critical of himself, but he was also wise, perceptive, and kind. He possessed a strong sense of realism, combined with a self-confidence that came from years of experience in his work. He was a charming and attractive person, competent and skilled in his craft, and he carried himself with a nobility and grace that earned him the respect and admiration of those around him.

Despite all his virtues, Putnam was not without flaws. He struggled with fears of being evil or making mistakes, and he was deeply afraid of being seen as sentimental, flattering, obsequious, or corrupt. Putnam's inflexibility sometimes caused him to overlook the nuances of a situation, leading to hasty or unjust decisions. His fear of being evil or making mistakes made him second-guess himself and doubt his abilities, leading to indecisiveness and hesitancy in critical moments. His need to be seen as a moral hero and role model made him overly self-righteous and judgmental of others, alienating those around him. His naivety and innocence made him vulnerable to being taken advantage of by dishonorable individuals, endangering himself and those he cared about. His fear of being sentimental or flattering made him come across as aloof or distant, making it difficult for him to form close relationships. His fear of being corrupt or persistent made him overly cautious, causing him to miss opportunities to make a difference or help others. His fear of being obsequious or despicable made him proud, arrogant, and overconfident, leading to poor decisions and potentially dangerous situations.

In addition to his fear of being sentimental, Putnam also struggled with psychological Black Seagull addiction and survivor's guilt for much of his life. These issues stemmed from the emotional pain he experienced due to the loss of his first wife and adopted son, among others. Putnam's survivor's guilt caused him to feel responsible for the deaths of others, resulting in intrusive memories and thoughts that contributed to his addiction and other mental health issues. His compulsive behavior of constantly seeking new conquests was a coping mechanism to overcome his guilt. Unfortunately, this, along with his fear of being sentimental, made it difficult for him to form meaningful and healthy relationships, leaving him during a lot of time emotionally unavailable. (More information can be found in the Health/Mental Health Problems section below.)

Despite these struggles, Putnam remained a reliable and trustworthy ally, a dependable and loving friend and family member, and a man whose virtues set an example for all those around him.

Religious beliefs

Putnam, due to his education, was an atheist, but after the Magne Massacre, he acquired some faith. He did not become a religious fanatic like Merten, but he began to believe in the gods. Putnam was a witcher who held a certain reverence for the goddess Freyja, but his religious beliefs were not as strong or central to his identity as a witcher. He saw his adherence to the witcher code and acting with justice and duty as more important than his religious beliefs. Despite this, he still tried to embody Freyja's values, in his daily life, and saw this as a way to pay homage to the goddess.

Though Putnam was constantly on the move, he still found ways to connect to the goddess. He carried with him a small statue of Freyja, which served as a reminder of her presence in his life. He also participated in rituals and ceremonies whenever he was able to attend a temple of Freyja.

Putnam's religious beliefs were more of a personal philosophy than a strict adherence to a traditional organized religion. He saw the goddess Freyja as a source of inspiration and guidance, but his beliefs were not as formalized or structured as those of someone who regularly participated in religious rituals or ceremonies. He was also not as dogmatic in his beliefs, being open to the idea of other gods and goddesses, or even other religions.

Equipment

Putnam was always well-equipped with a variety of weapons and tools to aid him in his monster-hunting endeavors. His signature armor was the Griffin Armor. In addition to this, he possessed a Griffin Silver Sword, a finely crafted blade forged in Mahakam by the skilled hands of dwarves. This sword was a gift from his older brother figure Coën on his 16th birthday, and it was one of Putnam's most prized possessions.

Another blade in Putnam's arsenal was an Ofieri Steel Witcher Saber, which he received as a gift from Maliq Nibras after rescuing his daughter and in compensation for having lost his Griffin Steel Sword. This blade came from the extinct School of the Scorpion, and it had been restored by the best blacksmiths in the Far South country.

Putnam was also known for carrying a crossbow as part of his arsenal. His original crossbow was a gift from Gah'el of Kagen after he passed The Trials. However, it was unfortunately destroyed during a particularly difficult contract. Later on, during Putnam's time on the Fabio Sachs expedition to the Far East, Kai Yih gifted him with a new crossbow, more specifically a Zerrikanian Repeating Crossbow. This crossbow was originally Kai Yih's own, and she even taught Putnam how to use it. It held a special significance for the two of them as a symbol of their love and bond.

To help him regulate his abilities as a Source, Putnam wore a Dimeritium earring given to him by Braith. He also wore a silver chain, which he used to combat monsters such as strigas.

As a witcher, Putnam kept a journal to document his hunts, make notes on monsters he had encountered, and sketch their features. His journal also contained a bestiary where he further developed his research into the creatures he faced. Following the teachings of Keldar and other of his masters, Ealdred, Putnam took meticulous notes and sketches in his journal to aid him in his work.

Regarding the wrist blade obtained in Zangvebar, he would keep during all his life, occasionally using it, with only a modification on the blade, changing the original, for one of silver, and using it against, for example, some type of vampires and theriantropes.

Later in life, after founding the School of the Crane, Putnam made the decision to switch from his Griffin School equipment to that of the Cranes, which included a

new medallion and silver sword. The Crane equipment was better suited to his evolving combat style, which focused on agility and acrobatics necessary for killing mainly aquatic and aerial monsters. However, despite this change, he refused to part with his Ofieri Steel Witcher saber, a blade that had proven its worth in countless battles and held a deep sentimental value for him.

Health / mental health problems

Due to the many challenges he faced in his life, Putnam developed a series of health and mental health problems, which he eventually overcame. These should be taken into account when writing about or creating content related to the character.

After Tubiel's death, Putnam struggled with alcohol and drug like addiction, which according to the Jellinek scale, was that of an alpha drinker. This means that his dependence was purely psychological and not physical (he is a witcher after all). He consumed Black Gull in order to cope with the emotional pain of Tubiel's death and the phantom pain in his right arm, but it was not as severe as Merten's "alcoholism", which could be classified as gamma.

Putnam also possessed hypersexuality, a trait common among witches, but in his case, it was exacerbated by his brother's experiments and tortures. This is mentioned here only as a reference.

Putnam also possessed a certain Don Juanism beyond the archetypal character trait. He had a compulsion to flee from one achievement to another in an unconscious, never-ending quest to overcome an unconscious sense of guilt stemming from not having truly overcome the deaths of his wife Tubiel and adopted son. He suffered from Survivor's Guilt, specifically type 2/3. He felt guilty about the things he failed to do, and often suffered post-traumatic "intrusions" as he relived the event again and again. He tried to alleviate this by accompanying Fabio on his expeditions, as it was an unknown terrain where he couldn't have these intrusions as he was too busy on being focused on protecting Fabio and the rest of the expedition members. He also fell into the description of sufferers who sometimes blame themselves for the deaths of others, including those who died while rescuing the survivor or whom the survivor tried unsuccessfully to save.

Art / Image Credits

Although I am pro-human-AI integration and consider neo-Luddism to be a futile resistance against the inevitable, it doesn't mean I can't empathize with artists and understand their positions. The AI-generated art showcased in this article has always been used in a supplementary manner and most of them edited by me. Whenever feasible, I kindly urge you to support and commission human artists.

The primary AI programs employed were versions 4 and 5 of *Midjourney*, *Stable Diffusion* and *Artbreeder*. Regarding editing software, the majority used were *Picsart*, *FaceTune*, *Prequel App* and *FaceApp*.

- Most of comissioned arts were done by Pukieart.
- Early Putnam arts by Ahmad Safwan.
- Putnam Expression Sketch by Diversity Luck.
- Putnam Pitch and Fabio Sachs Portrait Sketches by Teradiamart.
- Prototype Diving Suit by InfernalFinn.
- Fabio Sachs and Putnam Pitch in the Tuyotuki Islands by Iván Mazo Sánchez.
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- Putnam at the end of 1281 by Siccada Art.
- Putnam relaxing in Haakland by Voracious Cake.
- The Witcher 1 screenshot by mattsgaming88.
- Ciri by Dolis-ly.
- Back scars by Voracious Cake.
- Putnam and D'yaebL by Siccada Art.

Character Credits

- Jolanta by Icy.
- **Marina Aep Dornala** by Patito.
- Ásgærðr is a adaptation of the character of the same name by Sunflower.
- Mazheva is a adaptation of the character of the same name by Nuna.
- Trill is a adaptation of the character of the same name by Raquel Quesada Ponga.
- Halsey "The Basan" was a character created by me, but later taken and expanded by Tiki.
- Ezeld "The Parrot" was a character created by me, but later taken and expanded by Witcher017.
- Anika Masir by TPatricio.
- Adalwulf of Aedirn by Adalwulf of Aedirn.
- Nasira is a canon character, but was expanded by SchoolOfTheLycan.
- Birrex by Adalwulf of Aedirn.
- Jalast by Adalwulf of Aedirn.
- Matlena by the D'ao Team.
- Evelyn Ruach by Hvitna.
- Velcal by Adalwulf of Aedirn.
- Caldigi by Adalwulf of Aedirn.
- Zeus by Hvitna.
- Brianna Vassermiller by Hvitna.

Trivia

- Joaquim Sorolla is a reference to the Spanish painter **Joaquín Sorolla**^[↗].
- The term "panhuman" mentioned several times in the article is a reference to its usage in the science fiction novel saga "The Culture" by Ian Banks. In The Witcher context, it would apply to non-human races (although it

wouldn't be as popular as the non - human term for all the races) that have the ability to hybridize with humans.

- Putnam originally emerged as a very standard witcher within the world of The Witcher back in 2018. To make him more different (and not so Geralt - like), while reading the books, I decided to take advantage of Fabio Sachs being a practically tertiary character and expand from that point. Even so, there are nods to Geralt, although they are more a tribute than anything else.
- Tubiel and Putnam's wedding, is partly a subtle criticism of mods like [Farewell of the White Wolf](#)^[1] for being too "fairy tale / classical happy ending" for The Witcher.
- If Geralt in the first two books, his short stories borrow a lot from traditional European tales, especially Germanic and Slavic being a "dark parody" of these, Putnam in his case, would be his Mediterranean (mostly Greek and Turkish) and Arabic counterpart. Borrowing his stories from works such as [One Thousand and One Nights](#)^[2], these stories have not been included in the article, because it would be too long (more than it already is), but they would happen in different moments of his history, in which there are those gaps.
 - So if you want to write a short story using one of these folktales as a reference, go ahead. Just let me know, and if I see that it fits, I'll include it in this page (in a summarized form, obviously)
- The [Manisa Genesis](#) is inspired by the [Alexandria Genesis](#).^[1]
- [Kai Yih](#) is a reference to famous chinese pirate from the 18th -19th century: [Ching Shih](#).^[1]
- "*Eagle Bearer*" is a reference to the videogame [Assassin Creed Odissey](#)^[1].
- Fabio's only son was named Putnam, after his witcher friend who had accompanied him and saved his life on so many occasions.
- The title "Knight of the North" is a [GOT](#)^[1] reference.
- Originally, I had my doubts about whether or not to retcon Putnam's encounter and "romance" with Ciri, as Ciri is a very difficult character to handle. I tried to do it as best as I could and keep it relatively ambiguous. Let's say that the encounter with Ciri (apart from developing Putnam as a character) is more of a pitch for how I think a game with her should be, considering how powerful the character is. This pitch is based on elements presented in the Hussite trilogy and the [Extended Ancient Pantheon Project](#)

from the site as well as the retcon that CD Projekt Red made regarding The White Frost. As for the romance between them, it is partly to give Ciri more similarities with Geralt beyond the white hair that starts growing at the end of the books or her becoming a witcheress at the end of TW3 (examples of this are the famous letters that Geralt left to his lovers in the books, Yennefer and Mozaïk being notable examples). It is also a tribute to the non-canonical romance with Galahad and the implied ship in the books (as well fanon) ship of Cahir x Ciri (since Putnam is also, in his own way, as already said is a deconstruction of a knight trope, in the case of Cahir the Black Knight, and in the case of Putnam, the more classic knight / White Knight).

- The language for the Kvens is mainly [Inari Sámi](#)[[↗]].

- There is no known official date for the destruction of Kaer Seren.

Technically, Erland's article in the official Wikia, lets you intuit it in 1160s, but of course. This contradicts the status that the Griffins had as highly respected. Which, in the 12th century, could provoke a conflict between several crowns and the mages, if it came to that, because the anti-Witcher propaganda was not yet so powerful. Besides the fact that it has not been confirmed in the timeline of the games. Added to the fact that the vast majority of schools fell in the 13th century, not the 12th. In addition to that, the books. Where Coën's recent journey to Kaer Morhen could have been influenced precisely by this factor (*in the Fanon it is Keldar's orders, in book! canon, we do not know the reason*). It would make sense, then, that with Kaer Morhen in decline, The Manticores likewise, so that it would be a majority of schools that fell in the 13th century, that it would be Viper, Bear, Griffin and Cat. And 1249 has been selected, so that it could also match the Griffin killed by Leo Bonhart. It would be very difficult for the remaining Griffins to have been active for such a long time without a place to spend the winter. The clearest example of this is the Vipers, with officially only Letho, the Unknown Viper Witcher, Serrit and Auckles as confirmed active members.

- The inclusion of Dasnarr is a tribute / reference to the character of the same name, created by yuikami-da one of the first witcheress / witcherlass OCs, as it dates back to 2011, long before the concept became trendy at the end of the decade. Please, visit her here and if you know about her because of this article, tell her that I send my regards! : [Dasnnar, The Wicher](#)[[↗]].

- The romance of Putnam and Adela from 1278, is inspired by the possible romance that [D'ao Team](#) wanted to implement in their adventure for The

Witcher 2.

- The Trial of the Pendulum is inspired by this post in [The Witcher Amino](#).^[↗]
- The Trial of Rememberance is inspired by this post in [The Witcher Amino](#).^[↗]
- The Trial of the Stone Wall is inspired by this post in [The Witcher Amino](#).^[↗]
- The Trial of the Contract is inspired by this post in [The Witcher Amino](#).^[↗]
- In the Tales of The World of The Witcher Timeline, there is a big difference with respect to the CD PROJEKT canon, and is that, Brehen does not die because of the Striga, but Remus from the Netflix series but adapted. This is so, because of the potential of the Cat of Iello, and also to give a justification to Berengar to stay with the Wolves, and remain a witcher, even though he is supposed to "hate" it. All of this, then, was due to his friendship with Remus. Which, after his death, would give more weight to Berengar's motivation to join the Salamandra and betray the Wolves.
- Although to a lesser extent, the burn scars on his back sometimes cause pains that can significantly affect Putnam.
- Putnam, like Geralt imitated an accent, in Putnam's case, from Skellige, more specifically that of Ard Skellig although he wasn't entirely good at it, and the influence of the Koviri accent was noticeable. This gave him a very curious hybrid accent. Eventually, as time went on and he no longer used to introduce himself as Putnam of Skellige, he would lose it in favor of the standard Koviri accent.
- The scar Putnam has on his lips was made by Jolanta.
- Due to the great trauma of the death of Tubiel and his adopted son, plus the burning of the castle. He always had some reluctance / fear to use the Igni Sign in a powerful way because it reminded him of that event.
- For a long time, and despite complaints from [Tubiel of Brenna](#) Putnam wore a headband but he lost it during the Magne Massacre and after those events did not wear one again, due to the bad memories it brought him. The idea is that this, together with all the tragedy that happened in the Magne massacre, represents a great loss of his innocence and naivety and also a nod / easter egg to Book! Geralt.
- He also has a small pain in his left arm, as a result of the tortures to which he was subjected by his brother. This was not a nuisance, except when Putnam was under a lot of stress.
- Putnam has a keen sense of humor and is not above making a sarcastic quip or a witty remark when the situation calls for it.

- Apart from Geralt of Rivia other childhood idols of Putnam were George of Kagen and Raven.
- Regarding languages, Putnam understands and can read Elder Speech at 40% or so. With its dialect, Ellyon, he can understand about 60%.
- Putnam is not a fan of unnecessary violence and prefers to avoid conflict whenever possible. However, he is always ready and willing to defend himself and those he cares about if the need arises. Putnam is a foodie and loves to try new and exotic dishes whenever he gets the chance. He's particularly fond of spicy foods, and can handle heat levels that would make most people's eyes water.
- Despite being initially hesitant about adopting a child, Putnam was immediately taken with Sigurd's quiet intelligence and curiosity.
 - In the years following Sigurd's death, in many places, he would often sit alone, lost in thought, and it was clear to anyone who knew him that he was still grieving deeply.
 - Putnam had a hard time accepting Sigurd's death and often found himself talking to him as if he were still there. He would share his thoughts and feelings with Sigurd, hoping that somehow he would hear him and find peace.
 - Putnam possessed a wide range of abilities, including standard witcher skills such as alchemy, signs, Witcher mutations, crossbow proficiency, expert hand-to-hand combat, bomb-making, and swordsmanship. In addition, he had a talent for drawing and painting, which sets him apart from most other witches. Despite his impressive combat skills and expertise, Putnam also possessed a creative side that allows him to express himself through art. It is also worth noting that he was a Source, which was more of a curse than a boon for him, as he could struggle to control his magical abilities if he loses the small dimeritium earring he wears.
 - The Skjoldungs are not only a reference to the legendary Danish Viking family, but to the Jomsvikings^[1], which would basically be the Jomsvikings from The Witcher Universe.
 - Ragnar an Craite and Loki an Craite are two non-canon characters, from the short story *Something begins, Something ends*, but after reading their lore again, I thought they could be adapted in an interesting way.

- Trying to maintain the spirit of Sapkowski's subverting fantasy tropes, Sigurd's death is intended to be a subversion of the **kid hero**^[↗] of many fantasy tales and universes such as Narnia.
- Despite the existence of "Cosmic Horrors" within the main Wikia project, my goal with Mimit was to subvert the cliché associated with the mad cultist in the subgenre. Instead, I sought to emphasize the classic ambition of mages, in The Witcher Saga but taking it to greater heights. With ambition transcending the mere control of genies or demons, expanding into uncharted territories.
- In the case of Tubiel, my primary intention was to subvert the common trope found in action movies and contemporary fantasy books, where a lone character confronts and battles an entire organization and win without any major consequences—a trope often referred to as the "**One-Man Army**".
^[↗] Rather than following this well-worn path, I aimed to present a different narrative approach with Tubiel. That despite her initial success, her actions would have consequences that she would ultimately have to face leading to her death.
- The rescue of princess Nurshah is inspired by this fanmade The Witcher 3 DLC Pitch : **The Sands of Ofir Fanmade Expansion DLC Pitch**^[↗]
 - Some locations of Ofir are from The Witcher 3 Fanmade DLC Pitch while others are from this **fanmade map**^[↗].
 - The nuak 'fuv is a dark parody / reference to the Muad ' dib animal from the Dune universe. So imagine a kind of carnivorous desert mouse about the size of a goat, it would be something like this.
 - The Ak deñiz is both based in the White Desert from Egypt, the National Park of Lençóis Maranhenses in Brasil, and the reconstructed landscape of Ancient Fuerteventura of the Canary Islands.
 - The büyürähips are based on **Zoroastrism**^[↗] priests known as **Magi**^[↗]. They would also be called in - universe with that name and the first magis, in fact, would be the founders of several **Hannuan** dynasties.
 - Putnam's story in Zangvebar, draws on three sources. The first one, a poor translation made with Google Translate of a Polish forum from 2003 where concepts for Ofir and Zangvebar were discussed / given for the Book! canon. The second, the aforementioned pitch for a DLC in the Ofir section and

finally, slightly the stay of King Solomon in Ethiopia according to the legends (since Putnam being ofiri, I wanted to include something more Jewish, as the region is also inspired by certain traditions of this people)

- The city of Menutias is a reference to the name given by Greco - Roman sources to Zanzibar more specifically to the island of Unguja.
- Xirnedh Jr is inspired by artists like C. Tangana and Don Omar.
- Negus is a direct reference to the title used by Ethiopian kings / Emperors. While barnegus is a more subtle reference to the title used by Ethiopian governors.
- The wrist blade, as is obvious, is a reference / is based on the hidden blade from Assassin's Creed. Although in a similar way as the **beam katana** from No More Heroes it is inspired by the lightsaber from Star Wars.
 - The origin of the wrist blade being from Apumayu and not from Ofir, is simple. I didn't want the reference to be too obvious, and I wanted to give it an identity of its own, being a weapon created in basically pre-Columbian cultures, but with a medieval level of technology. My idea, is that it was created somewhere between the 7th and 9th century and perhaps, the weapon would have spread to Zangvebar to help the Paladins of the Zang against the Aen Nílfe. Feel free to invent based on that lore for the weapon if you want.
- Many of the terms come from the amazing **Zerrikani Dialect** article by SchoolOfTheLycan with the exception of the word Raul taking from Romanian, meaning "*evil / the evil*".
- Chernobog is an attempt to mix the Netflix version with the rune mentioned in The Witcher 3 without falling into the "cliché" of it being a god. That's why he was made as a powerful dragon.
- At some point after the Haaki Invasion, Brianna Vassermiller and Putnam developed a pretty good relationship, the nature of this relationship is unclear and varied from tale to tale. However, all tales agreed that so good was this relationship that according to rumors and legends, the mythical daughter of the Ebbinger mage, Sylthana considered Putnam as one of her uncles.
- Legends and tales regarding Putnam told tales about him exploring the also theoretical and mythical **Thíos Aine** where he ended in the subterranean kingdom of Romnor which helped in various ways. The legends said that the king of this kingdom, Hem'riks gave him the title of knight. Being that his

second knightly title.

Impact on The Witcher Community

Since its creation, the character has been growing in popularity. And he has had quite an impact within the community. At first, his impact began, as a simple comment, wishing his addition to the Witchers expansion released for Gwent.

Subsequently, it was mentioned and integrated to the Gwent mechanics, as a suggestion for a possible expansion, by u / Jazi0 in the Gwent subreddit post [School of the Crane - WotW expansion for Great Sea](#)^[↗], with a pretty good reception. Later, even becoming integrated in fan - made decks, as a hero of an ofieri faction done by sevast1011 that you can bought here : [GWENT/GWINT CARDS \(6 NEW FACTIONS\) 612 CARDS Witcher 3 \(ENG EDITION\)](#)^[↗] you can also see some images where Putnam's card appears in the gallery.

On April 19, 2021, Putnam appeared in a YouTube The Witcher lore video by youtuber Kytan which explained the [School of the Crane](#)^[↗], by 2023, the video reached about 8.4k views.

In 2023, Putnam was "referenced" in a way, in a Looper article about Fabio Sachs and his appearance in Netflix's The Witcher S3. More specifically, in this part : *Eventually, he would find the funding to begin his exploration with the monarchy of Lyria and Rivia, giving him the necessary resources in exchange for Fabio establishing trade routes to the new lands. His expeditions would take him far to the East, North, and West.* By the time that I am writing this the article is still available online, in any case, you can read the archived version [here](#)^[↗].

Notes by the author

- Some of the old comissioned arts may have slightly contradictions with what is presented in the article since they belong to early versions of the character. I apologize for that, but overall, even today, they represent the final version of the character quite well.
- If Geralt is a general subversion of the Lone Wolf trope in books, in Putnam's case, it is more of a subversion of the knight and the Don Juan archetypes, while avoiding the pitfalls of the Casanova Wannabe trope. Putnam's character breaks away from the traditional knightly archetype by

challenging the expected behaviors and ideals associated with knights. He deviates from the typical chivalrous, honorable figure and instead embodies a more complex and morally ambiguous persona. By doing so, Putnam defies the conventional notions of heroism and explores the flawed nature of individuals. Similarly, Putnam's portrayal as a subversion of Don Juan highlights his departure from the stereotypical womanizer archetype. Instead of merely pursuing shallow relationships and conquests, Putnam's character delves into deeper emotional connections and experiences genuine intimacy. This subversion adds depth to his character, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of his relationships and the impact they have on his journey. By avoiding the Casanova Wannabe trope, Putnam's character remains grounded and avoids becoming a caricature. He possesses a genuine allure and charisma that goes beyond mere womanizing, making him a more compelling and multidimensional character.

- If Putnam's character is more focused on romance than other witchers, it is because, in part, he has some inspiration from the [Lad Lit](#)^[7] literature subgenre but in a medieval context.
- I do not know if there have been any other contributions or mentions from the community. If you know more, you can leave links in the comments. I simply want to thank you for the love you have given him. I never thought it would go this far, and I hope it continues to do so. For my part, if you want to write stories with him, make fanarts, etc... (*even NSFW, I know it's inevitable*) As long as you respect the lore. Everything is welcome, believe it or not, it makes me very happy to see that people like my boy. Regarding the stories, I don't know if it's clear from the article, but their motivations/arcs are simple. Beyond the expansion of The Witcher lore : Personal happiness, dealing with loss and the past, and balancing personal happiness and one's responsibilities.
- Regarding characters that have inspired the creation of Putnam, both real and fictional, some examples are: [Alexander the Great](#)^[7] (although the Alexander presented in medieval myths, not so much the real Alexander), [Bayek of Siwa](#) and [Eivor Varinsdottir](#) from the Assassin's Creed video game series, [Corvo Attano](#) from the Dishonored video game series (more so the Corvo presented in the novels expanding the game's universe than the Corvo from the games themselves), Don Juan, both the original version created by José Zorrilla and Byron's version (leaning more towards [Byron's](#)

Don Juan^[1] but within the world of The Witcher), some real explorers like Herodotus, and to a lesser extent, singers like Julio Iglesias^[2], and characters from The Witcher universe like Erland of Larvik. In addition to the character of Takeshi Kovacs, mainly drawing inspiration from the tv version, with some slight influences from his book version.

- Regarding the mentioned "long list of one-night lovers" and "lovers" of Putnam in 1280 and in the period from 1306 to 1325 respectively, it was included to emphasize the character's Casanova-like nature. Furthermore, if someone wishes to create a character who engages in a one-night encounter or romance with Putnam and it contributes to her development, it is warmly welcomed.
- If you want to use the character for stories or role-playing sessions involving the School of the Crane or Crane Witchers, feel free to do so. If you leave me the links in the comments, I will gladly take a look at them.
- For the NSFW version of the origins of Putnam 's back scars you can check [here^{\[3\]}](#).

Gallery



Putnam after a long day of work.



Putnam's main scars.



Putnam (Circa, 1280s)



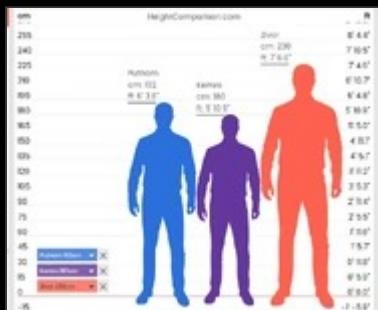
Ofieri Fan - Made Gwent Faction

where Putnam's appears



Putnam Gwent Card close up

Putnam Gwent Card (picture by Adalwulf of Aedirn)



Fancast edit of Cengiz Coşkun as Putnam Pitch

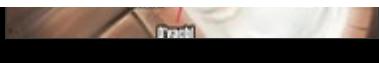


Another fancast edit of Cengiz Coşkun as Putnam Pitch



Origins of some of Putnam's scars





More origins of Putnam´s scars

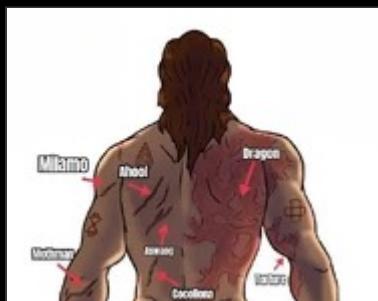
Fancast edit of Zach McGowan as Putnam Pitch



Putnam Expression Sketch



Putnam´s Signature in Nordling Common Tongue Alphabet



Origins of Putnam's back scars (SFW version)



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